

OLIVER ALL OVER AGAIN:
DICKENSIAN NARRATIVES OF ORPHANHOOD
IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the trope of orphanhood in mid-nineteenth century novels and argues that the orphan emerges as a symbol of middle-class fears about legitimacy and survival. Though many critics concentrate their analysis upon orphaned street children, arguing that authors used these figures to elicit sympathy for various social and political causes, the majority of orphans in nineteenth-century novels are members of the middle-class. In my dissertation, I examine the origin of the orphan as a synecdoche of middle-class anxiety in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, a novel whose title character Dickens and other authors continue to revise throughout the early and mid-Victorian era. Analysis of Oliver and his many reincarnations shows the evolution of an eighteenth-century orphan prototype into a character distinctly Victorian. The orphan, taking on a specific trajectory of middle-class formation that would culminate in the cultivation of morality and authenticity, symbolized the middle-class desire to survive and legitimize itself in England. As the century progresses, male and female literary orphans, who came to embody the complex gendered behavior requirements of the nineteenth-century middle class, had to undertake different, though equally important, courses of formation in order to ensure middle-class survival. Male and female authors continually reproduced this character throughout the era, but by mid-century, the Dickensian orphan narrative shifted slightly to reveal a stable middle class no longer worried about its origin or long-term survival but instead concerned about its need to reform England as a whole, so that the country adhered to middle-class values and becomes moral and authentic. Chapters of the dissertation explore the

evolving character of the orphan, including analysis of orphaned characters in *Wuthering Heights*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *A Child's History of England*, *Bleak House*, *No Name*, and *The Small House at Allington*. The latter two novels will show a distinct shift away from Dickens's use of the orphan as a middle-class symbol embodying fears about survival and explore how the orphan begins to evolve to emulate new class-based concerns about masculinity and professionalization. Always key, however, was the orphan's ability to cultivate and maintain a distinctly Victorian morality and authenticity.

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INTRODUCTION

Critics through the later Victorian era and the first half of the twentieth century spent much time debating Charles Dickens's ability to develop realistic characters. Many scholars and editors vociferously argued that Dickens's personalities, especially in the earlier novels, were too simple—too much like caricatures. The criticism prevailed for many years, for some scholars believed that caricature as a literary device equated with disparaging simplicity. Earle R. Davis, in his 1940 article "Dickens and the Evolution of Caricature," began to question this viewpoint, and he advocated that the Victorian author had a "distinct type of caricature," one that "emphasize[d] eccentricities and...mannerisms of speech and tags by means of which we remember the individuals in his motley world" (240). Davis's argument rests on the idea that Dickens advances the role of caricature to the point that it functioned to bring about a depth to characters who might otherwise be overlooked, rather than serving to focus the reader's attention solely on the comedic.

Though scholars indeed have moved on to identify the complexities of such seemingly facile characters, particularly when it comes to Dickens's later stories, it is not unheard of to witness scholars still pronounce his protagonists as caricatures—especially when applying the word to one of Dickens's earliest novels. The title character in *Oliver Twist*, for example, is often subjected to this simplistic label today and was in the nineteenth century as well, with critics pointing out that Oliver is too good, too moral, and too perfect.¹ Even by the end of the

¹ Productive examinations of Oliver's perfect and/or caricatured depiction can be found in many articles, including "Truth and Persuasion: The Language of Realism and of Ideology in *Oliver Twist*" by Michal Peled Ginsburg and "Another Version of Pastoral: *Oliver Twist*" by Joseph M.

nineteenth century, in 1897, when Andrew Lang, the famous collector of fairy tales and folklore, produced a new edition of *Oliver Twist*, he could not resist accusing Dickens of poor characterization in this early novel. When the edition was published, Lang and a writer for the *Saturday Review* launched a vicious screed against the long-dead author, saying that this early story was, in essence, ridiculous. The two men defame the novel for its overuse of “[c]aricature,” particularly when it came to the depiction of Oliver. “Oliver’s ‘innocence and elegant language may be explained by heredity,’” the reviewer states, quoting Lang, “[but it is this caricature that forms] part of the general weakness [of the novel]” (358).

Indeed, these criticisms are at least partially valid. Oliver is the epitome of the Christ-like child incapable of committing a calculated error. He is good to his core, a child who, according to an 1839 reviewer, is “improbable...[and] a pattern of modern excellence, guileless himself, and measuring others by his own innocence; delicate and high-minded, affectionate, noble, brave, generous, with the manners of a son of a most distinguished gentleman, not only uncorrupted but incorruptible” (*Quarterly Review* 96). Oliver never fails to feel remorse for any wrongful act, always unintended, of course, and he willingly works hard at every task, eager to prove his worth and contribute to the good of all. Few children of Oliver’s age, then or now, can be said to be so perfect.²

Duffy, Jr. (among others). An especially interesting article, however, is “The Instabilities of Inheritance in *Oliver Twist*” by Cates Baldridge. In the article, the author suggests that Oliver is an “incorruptible” because Dickens is worried that the influence of the home is not enough to ensure his goodness. Therefore, the child must be born and emerge in the world “fully formed.” Though I disagree that Dickens believes that the home cannot perform the proper character-building tasks middle-class boys need in order to become men, I do find the author’s identification of “anxiet[ies]” about forming productive citizens to be quite valuable (184).

² For more information about *Oliver Twist* appearing as a child embodying Christ-like virtue, and for a comparison of Oliver with John Bunyan’s Christian (the pilgrim of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*), please see Barry Qualls’s *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge UP, 1982). Qualls describes Oliver as “the perfect Romantic archetype...innocent, pure, untouched

The idealistic attributes that lead to Oliver's label as a caricature are often viewed pejoratively, for the word usually is defined negatively as that which is deliberately "grotesque" or "ludicrous" (*OED Online*). But nothing about Oliver matches these descriptions, and it is clear that in the child's status as the novel's hero, Dickens does not intend to emphasize any abnormal traits in his make-up. Therefore, perhaps the reader should consider that Dickens is creating a new kind of caricature—one that has a positive rather than a darkly comedic or sentimental agenda. Oliver's function as a type of caricature in the novel should not be frowned upon, nor should it relegate him or his story to a diminished status. In reality, Oliver is an astounding character who reveals a startling authorial gesture of didacticism. In spite of his stereotypical goodness, this child faces yet rises above all obstacles in the world and secures a position for himself in society based upon his adherence to a work ethic rather than luck (as might happen in an eighteenth century story about an orphaned or foundling child in his situation). Taken alone, these aspects of Oliver's story indicate that he could be a stand-in for a particular value system—one that Dickens would evoke over and over again throughout his canon of work and one that would influence other writers of the Victorian age. Oliver is no mere ideal child; instead, he was the model for a rising class to emulate and to aspire to become in the real world.

Dickens accomplishes his ideal child's purpose by casting the character into two very distinct roles: an overly romanticized child and an uncertain orphan. Both of these archetypes have been recast repeatedly, but Oliver's status as a perfect orphaned child most strongly associates him with the emerging value system of the Victorian middle class. Like the members of this stratum of society, he must struggle to survive in a class-based world unused to allowing for upward mobility. The threat such a world creates is that one may rise, but one may also fall.

by a hostile environment...[and on] a journey towards a happy-ever-after world utterly removed from the evil left behind" (23).

In Oliver's predictable tale, Dickens allows the child to become a teacher or model in the form of a positive caricature. In this respect, Oliver has the ability to serve much more readily as a rhetorical figure who actually will be recursively rewritten by Dickens and other novelists as the century progresses. This character, who begins as a caricature that critics like Lang may mock, will alter and embody growing sophistication as the middle class's underlying interests about self-definition and surviving to its position of social and political hegemony. Tracing the successive appearances of Oliver as a rhetorical and characterological figure embodying the fears of mid-nineteenth century middle-class survival will be the focus of this dissertation.

Orphans in the Victorian World

The orphaned character of *Oliver Twist* is the perfect vehicle through which Dickens can produce discourse about the dominating class of the Victorian era. Almost all Victorian literary critics eventually must encounter Dickens, for he is in many ways a touchstone for the time in which he lived. Like so many other writers, he became obsessed with the fear that his idealized, virtuous, and powerful middle class was on the brink of corruption, and the fear that the class could fall prompted Dickens to create a character who could embody all of those fears—someone who could speak to the overwhelming sense of isolation the middle class felt at its core. From the beginning of his career as a writer, Dickens consumes himself with the problem of the middle class and develops a symbol through which he can successfully represent the middle class as a whole and from which the Victorian middle class can learn how to behave—and this symbol turns out to be the orphan.

Through developing his concepts about orphanhood and using orphaned characters, Dickens constructs into a coherent argument all of the middle-class fears about long-term success and survival. The world on the page and the symbolic figure of a struggling orphan in a society often indifferent to it or incapable of providing for it offer fascinating insights about the middle class. By assembling the entire group into one character that is an orphan, Dickens can use the narrative space to place the orphan/middle class into various survival scenarios and offer multiple outcomes from which the middle class can analyze and learn from in reality. In doing so, Dickens creates a new positive caricature within an older form of caricature, and the end result allows this figure to provide valuable commentary contemporary to Dickens's world.

The visibility of orphans in Victorian media and culture cannot be ignored, for they were everywhere. Real orphans populated Victorian England both in reality and in literature. Many Victorian novelists, journalists, and government officials observed the problem that they posed, and those living in England witnessed orphaned children living on the streets and in institutions. Many religious and journalistic writings mandate that society has an obligation to provide for these children, and poems, pamphlets, and articles were produced to strike a sympathetic chord in the minds of the audience, imploring readers to save the vulnerable who have no home to shelter them and no food to nourish them. While these stories of loss and renewal are often pathos-driven novels appealing to a widely sentimental audience, the reality of orphans in the nineteenth century was dire indeed—a condition amplified by the prodigious number of orphans in Britain. The definition of what constituted orphanhood in this time is quite different from how one identifies it today. An orphan logically could be termed as a child “without parents;” however, “in Victorian culture the term also referred to one who was deprived of only one parent,” a definition that left many children occupying the unstable social status of orphan

(Peters 1). It is not an exaggeration to state that, in London alone, thousands of orphaned children tried to sustain life while the British government struggled to provide a moral and practical solution to the problem.

Due to so much attention being paid to orphans in journalism and popular culture, the orphan story as a nineteenth-century narrative device began to develop into what has become yet another familiar sentimental cliché. As revealed by numerous critics, readers often experienced an emotional response when they encountered Victorian orphan stories. After all, even though it may be fiction, simply the enduring and popular legend that Dickens's little Nell drew worried crowds to the docks in America as the final installments of *The Old Curiosity Shop* arrived provides modern readers with a powerful example of the emotional investment nineteenth-century readers cultivated in their engagement with orphan heroes. The response to these novels is not entirely dead, even though today many may not weep at Nell's demise. Readers still pity Oliver Twist; and, sometimes in spite of themselves, they reluctantly identify with both the young and old Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights*.

These stories still hold tremendous sentimental appeal and few forget famous tales such as *Oliver Twist* or stories about homeless orphans like little Jo in *Bleak House*—children who endure both obvious and unimaginable hardships on the streets of London in their everyday effort to survive. Surprisingly, despite their popularity and the enduring hold these stories have over the popular imagination, narratives about street children make up a comparatively small proportion of orphan portrayals in Victorian novels. In reality, most of the orphaned children in Victorian narratives are middle class, and their struggles to survive their circumstances—and the narrative—are the focus of the author's attention. A closer look at the characters categorized as orphans in Victorian fiction reveals that most of them were not living in poverty or in situations

of extreme abuse, and no one has argued comprehensively about why authors and society were so obsessed with this figure in all of its economic positions.

Of the single book-length studies devoted to critical interpretation of the orphan—and there are not many—two predominate: Laura Peters’s *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire* (2000) and Lydia Murdoch’s *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (2006). Though both authors spend most of their time analyzing poor orphans, their studies prove to be valuable in vastly different ways when thinking about the concept of Victorian orphanhood in general. While Peters theoretically analyzes literary orphans, also mixing in accounts of real orphans to bolster her points, Murdoch only examines factual accounts of orphans and workhouse children of the nineteenth century. Other than sharing the common topic of orphans, the studies seemingly have little to do with one another. It is important, however, to take a closer look at exactly how they could work together to provide a strong foundation for future orphan studies. For example, Peters rightly recognizes the importance of merging literary analysis of texts with blue book statistics and journalistic accounts of impoverished orphans during the Victorian era. She parallels the problems orphans—specifically those defined as non-English or of a different racial background—face in texts by Emily Brontë to Charles Dickens and George Eliot with the historical treatment of poor orphans, waifs, and street arabs. Her conclusion that the orphan represented an unwanted “surplus, a financial burden to be got rid of” (84), in society—a “surplus” that the government ultimately “use[d]...to represent a marginalized ‘otherness’ and difference” (97)—produces a memorable effect on the reader. Murdoch follows Peters’s study with a historical analysis of orphans. Though she occasionally references novels, Murdoch primarily examines journalistic accounts and illustrations, along with statistical reports. Her thesis that the orphan problem of the

nineteenth century was devastating and overwhelming is proven, but her most promising insight has to do with her argument that the government's approach to the country's orphan problem was one dependent upon middle-class morality and social image.

Though Peters also admits that the orphan is “a special responsibility of the state” that must be molded properly to prevent the formation of a savage, Murdoch takes this cause a bit further, exposing the enforced orphaning of many children during the Victorian era. As stated earlier, orphan status in the nineteenth century could be defined in various ways. Murdoch deftly exposes another type of orphanhood—a condition forced upon children of poor families who could not care for them. Often these families would be forced to surrender their children to government authorities or they would believe that they were simply placing the minor in another environment for a short time until the parent could reclaim him or her. Unfortunately, many parents never reunited with their children. Murdoch explains that the government often enforced the separation by sending the child to other towns or countries, or simply kept the children in a state-run institution. The reasoning behind keeping poor children away from their parents is associated with the familiar theory of infection (also applied to various literary stories about street children)—a theory that by necessity must be associated with Victorian class anxiety. Murdoch touches on this point, explaining that the institutions housing these false orphans “presented an organic view of English identity, meaning that the health or well-being of each part within a stable class and social order was dependent on all others...[t]he working-class home could not [conform to]...middle-class concepts of domesticity and individualism” (46).

But perhaps this identification between the orphan as both real and literary figure in the Victorian era and the orphan as a threat to class boundaries can be traced back to an article written in 1975. In “Incarnations of the Orphan,” Nina Auerbach breezily introduces a survey of

various literary orphans that appeared throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Her explanation of why these figures appear so widely throughout the literature of this time is tied to her claim that the orphan is “the primary metaphor for the dispossessed, detached self...[and] can be thought of as a metaphor for the novel itself” (395). The thesis is followed through by dividing the two eras of orphan literature (that of the eighteenth century and that of the nineteenth century) as working to accomplish a movement from the orphan/novelist’s goal of “defining [oneself] as an artist” (398), placing the orphan in the role of a teacher in the earlier stories, to the Romantic and early Victorian version of the orphan that “comes to stand for pure selfhood,” or the artist recognized (404). References to Auerbach’s article are not necessary in Murdoch’s study; however, there is a mention of it in Peters’s text, though it does not directly function as a key theoretical source.

Possibly, Peters and Murdoch understood the article’s shortcomings. Many of Auerbach’s claims are followed up by little original analysis (probably because it is a survey), and she makes plenty of sweeping statements that could easily be proven inaccurate. Auerbach’s article, however, deserves a second look. Though her evidence rarely is substantiated by careful and productive analysis, she does make an intriguing declaration early on in her study. She states:

[The orphan] figure always remains himself, an archetype that continually impels novelists to him. But he is able to split his being according to the culture that contains him, his mutability becoming an important facet of his survival. His passage through three centuries of novels, and the different shapes he takes on, can almost be said to constitute a myth with shifting emphases; a myth that was particularly important in the nineteenth century, the great age of the English novel, but which began to germinate earlier, and which still has offshoots today. (396)

Although the rhetorical move may be unconscious, Auerbach resorts to a fascinating usage of scientific language to discuss the importance of the orphan. She initiates the argument that

orphans are potentially infecting, and even implies that something more dangerous and internal is occurring—not just within the character of the orphan but within Victorian society itself.

Auerbach's claim is that the orphan is like a "muta[ting]" cell that "split[s]" due to societal factors. Peters and Murdoch develop discussions about this concern in different ways. For Peters, the real danger was the internal relationship of the orphan to the family. The orphan "is not a foreign invading threat but is actually produced by and hence is an essential component of the family itself...a latent secret which might reappear at any moment thus making the family both untrustworthy and unstable" (22). But viewing the "unstab[ility]" as internal means that the orphan is, indeed, more than an outside infection. Murdoch is less concerned with the intimacies of family contamination from the orphan but is interested in the societal contamination by those who are "muta[tions]" of the status quo.

All of these arguments boil down to a key word in Auerbach's passage: "survival." She has identified a crucial idea that seeps into nearly every printed document from the early and mid-Victorian era. In writings centered around the subject of the middle class, authors ponder the question of how the middle class—the group primarily in charge of England—can ensure that it stays in control, that it survives and thrives in the long run. The theme of survival appears in articles about all kinds of subjects, but the articles are read by a middle-class audience and indicate a class-based concern. Auerbach obviously picks up on this anxiety, but she may not realize that she has linked it with the figure that will come to embody that concern.

Throughout these Victorian articles and stories, the authors often propose a plan that will keep the middle class stable and in control. The key to keeping the middle class—and, therefore, the nation—strong is expressed either firmly or indirectly as connected with morality. Cultivating and maintaining a unifying version of morality among the middle class seems to be

the answer to ensuring its survival for the Victorians, but the next question that emerges from this potential solution is how successfully to educate the masses, and this becomes a topic of conversation that consumes the middle class—and, particularly its writers—for years. In typical Victorian style, scholars and authors attempt to analyze and review the problem of the disintegrating morality of the middle class and the importance of cultivating stronger values in various venues. They spend hours discussing the role of the middle class in parliamentary debates, writing up newspaper accounts and compiling statistical reports of crime and disease that threaten the middle-class audience, and, of course, composing journal articles. But it will be the novelists who most clearly analyze and attempt to solve the problem of middle-class survival. The belief system that begins to evolve in novels during the early and mid-nineteenth century is that with a strong foregrounding of morality and authenticity, the middle class can successfully survive any danger of disintegration.

The Victorian middle class chose the literary forum as its favored means of educating its members about how to develop morality and authenticity.³ The function of literature during the early and mid-Victorian generations revolved around the idea that entertainment should be instructive, and writers were held to a high standard, serving as those who bear the burden of functioning as gatekeepers of knowledge for the masses. For example, the author of “Literary

³ Though the examples provided in this dissertation of how to properly educate middle-class citizens limits itself to discussions about the value of didactic literature, the general topic of educating the middle class became increasingly popular during the mid-century. A good example of this call to action among middle-class people to educate their own occurs in “The Education of the Middle Classes,” by an author identifying himself as “Charles B., an under-graduate of Cambridge.” In his essay, printed in an October 1847 edition of *The Mirror*, the young man advocates for the middle class to take responsibility for educating its own people, discouraging seeking help from the upper class and from investing so much time in educating the lower class. His reasoning is that the middle class is growing in power, and the middle class must take responsibility for the education of its young because they “will be called upon to exercise the most tremendous influences upon the destiny of our country!” (213)

Responsibility,” a plea to writers in 1841 to produce only the most moral literature, explains that during the nineteenth century authors should dutifully advocate morality for the good of all, that “the end and aim of all writers should be the advocacy of virtue and morality” (92-93). The novelist should “polish the whole [work] to stand the ordeal of the world’s criticism, and he must intermix *a moral design*... [so that the reader] will have been forced to read a lesson of morality, inasmuch as it was inseparable from the talents which attracted their attention and led them to the perusal” (93). The ultimate benefits of such novelistic intent are crucial to the health of the nation and the individual, as the author states a correlation between reading good literature and strength:

The health of the body almost entirely depends upon the aliment that nourishes it, and the sanity of the mind is equally due to the nutriment that supports it. If the corporeal aliment in the one case stimulates without nourishing, the palate is gratified, but the body impoverished; and if the mental nutriment in the second case excites without supporting, the taste is pleased, but the mind impaired, and the moral man would degenerate, as would the physical. It is thus that the moral world is affected by the literature of the day, and as virtue depends on morality, the virtues of mankind may diminish or increase according to the quality of works disseminated, and if this conclusion be allowed, what a degree of responsibility rests on authors of a country. (93)

Expressed without reserve is the fear that “the moral man would degenerate” if exposed to immoral literature. In essence, this verbalizes the fear that the body of the middle class could disappear, for morality and the middle class must exist as one and the same if the nation is to survive. The fear that the survival of the nation (i.e. the middle class that is in control of the country at this time) is at risk haunts the Victorians throughout most of the era. This concern forms the driving force that motivates their actions, works, compositions, and decisions—and that causes these actions and creations to emerge as didacticism. The idea of disappearing altogether or mutating into something horrible like the often vilified upper class or the ignorant,

animalistic lower classes (as many Victorian writers described them), also causes a curious problem: the middle class, in its quest to survive, began to self-isolate.

Writers and politicians express concern about unifying the middle class in language that strangely clings to the notion of morality as the binding force that seals the great middle class together in such a way that keeps it strong and in power. As an author in an 1866 *Saturday Review* complained, “[I]f we allow ourselves to go on calling the middle-class the great backbone of the country—a position which is supposed to follow from the bloatedness of the aristocracy—it must at least be admitted that a good many of the vertebrae are in an uncommonly shaky and decayed condition” (“Middle Class Morality” 478). Morality as a bonding agent among the middle class can be seen to provide the answer to these problems. And, for Victorians, morality does not simply mean acting upon moral teachings in a particular moment but also means embracing those teachings as core values that can be enacted at all times and in all places—and by everyone in the exact same way. Victorian novelists, in their quest to provide perfect models of morality, create ideal heroes—often simplistically referred to as caricatures—who abide by a moral code based heavily upon the notion of authenticity as identified by Lionel Trilling in *Sincerity and Authenticity*. These heroes are not meant to be ridiculed; instead, the Victorian audience took them very seriously, understanding their larger symbolic value.

Authenticity as a mode of behavior appears in every sphere of Victorian life. Not strictly a masculine pursuit, contemporary critics have recognized that the belief in authenticity as a middle-class value also was considered to be a vital component in the famous (or infamous) domestic sphere. As John Tosh points out in his seminal study *A Man's Place*, “[The h]ome came to be identified with childhood, innocence and roots—indeed with authenticity itself” (5).

And this concern with conveying the need to create or maintain authenticity is what drives the criticisms of *Oliver Twist* and other Victorian novels.

The Middle Class in Relation to Sincerity and Authenticity

The correlation between authenticity and successful growth and maturity of the middle-class citizen was a departure in thinking from previous eras in British history. For example, the eighteenth-century emphasis on class mobility and class definition revolved around notions of taste and an accepted mode of behavior identified by Trilling as sincerity. In his book, Trilling explains that before the Enlightenment and throughout much of the eighteenth century, the acceptable mode of behavior was defined as sincerity. To be sincere, a person expressed “an attitude or social opinion...through actions” regardless of how that person feels about those “actions” or expressions of sincerity (“Commentary”). In other words, people force themselves to develop a dual nature in order to successfully integrate within society. Individuals behave and act in socially acceptable and identifiable ways regardless of whether or not those behaviors or actions contradict values the person holds as an individual. Within this system, the ideal of “taste” evolves, and, with such an emphasis on performance, it is no surprise that drama rose to be the dominant form of popular artistic expression at this time.

A change began to occur, as Trilling explains, in the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, when sincerity begins to be seen as hypocrisy and dangerous to a system of belief (largely class-based) valuing not performance but “authentic” behavior. Historians and scholars see this change emerge in forms of artistic expression. Whereas the eighteenth century valued dramatic performance, nineteenth century writers turn to novels and dramatic monologue

poetry that examines, in depth, the psychology of an individual subject. Authenticity became the valued mode of behavior. By enacting the authentic self rather than the sincere performance, the community “underst[ands]...what the active person ‘really is’...[allowing everyone the opportunity] to somehow get behind sincerity to the real core of an individual” (“Commentary”). The idea of changing to authentic behavior rather than sincere behavior appears to be a good idea that promotes a purer truth and, therefore, leads to a higher sense of moral engagement with the world (something the Victorians, of the mid-nineteenth century at least, concerned themselves with a great deal). The dual nature of sincerity appears to be erased; even though, as long as they behaved correctly, the underlying motivations of a person did not always matter in the eighteenth century, one still could face problems of never knowing how to read a person correctly.

But the idealistic vision of living authentically is a complicated matter fraught with a duplicity all of its own. Sincerity, though it may not be the true self, is identifiable behavior socially sanctioned and understood. Authenticity, though in essence it might be seen as something more organic, pure, or best, cannot be controlled on a society-wide scale. Instead, authenticity, because it is formed by the individual, is different for everyone—at least in theory. Individuality becomes a dangerous notion in a society that sees true class definition as an embracing of core values—namely, a defined sense of morality. Therefore, the problem develops as to how to control authentic development of an individual in a way that leads to everyone enacting the same version of authenticity. But the Victorians believed that, even though educating a large group of people (especially such a diverse audience as the middle class) in such a way might be tricky, it was still possible to do so—and they would accomplish their goal through writing literature that would teach the middle class how to behave. The orphan becomes the stand-in model for the middle class.

Though the orphan figure was common in eighteenth-century literature, the orphan in Victorian novels is very different. Many critics, however, willingly ignore an orphan like Oliver Twist's connections with contemporary nineteenth-century culture and instead focus on his links to past literary characters, once again framing the novel as a copied caricature itself of previously published stories. Oliver most commonly is compared with foundling figures in eighteenth-century novels—children who, though distracted by adventures and bad luck, still thrive in the world because they are genetically blessed with a good background that saves them.

But is Oliver really just a repetition of an eighteenth-century picaresque foundling or orphan? Perhaps the answer appears in the early reviews of *Oliver Twist*. While people in the eighteenth century applauded the escapades of a character like Henry Fielding's Tom Jones into the seedier aspects of life, the reaction to Dickens's boy was quite different. The one criticism that reveals itself in reviews from the late 1830s is that Oliver's goodness is overshadowed by the immoral environments in which he finds himself. Unlike Henry Fielding's title character, who amuses the audience with his immoral behavior and who relishes each salacious experience, Oliver seems haphazardly thrown into bad environments. He is not there by choice, never seeking experience but instead consistently trying to return himself to a safe and secure space. For all of Oliver's goodness, he seems to know that he is at risk of contamination by the immoral people and places he encounters. No longer Fielding's amusing and adventurous foundling of the eighteenth century, this child appears to function for a different purpose than his predecessors, and it is one that is remarkably contemporary.

Though he may find himself in morally questionable situations, Oliver is no reproduction of Tom Jones, and not just because he scorns the seedy lifestyle Tom willingly jumps into in his story. Oliver's entire situation differs from that of Tom's. First and foremost, Dickens is telling a

story about and for the middle class. And another generally overlooked—but crucial fact—is that Oliver, also unlike Fielding’s character, is a true orphan and not a foundling. Though this seems to be a small detail, it is a distinction most important, for it separates Oliver from being a true member of the established upper class. Strangely, however, it is still through his genetic line that Oliver succeeds—but it has nothing to do with lineage of an established family name and fortune.

Dickens makes clear that it is Oliver’s goodness that allows him to rise above the lower class and an undesirable fate, and it is a goodness and morality that is class-based rather than related to genetics. Oliver’s connection with the middle class is important because once the issue of class is introduced to Oliver’s character, the reader finds it impossible to see the child as a simple or traditional caricature. Instead, in Oliver’s orphanhood experience, wherein he rises from nothingness to respectability, readers witness a commentary on the popular view of the middle class itself. Dickens, in particular, was obsessed with middle-class survival from the beginning, and this is the core reason one must resist reading his early novels, especially, as mere exercises in caricature or the wanderings of an immature writer. He strongly felt his mission to educate the reading public through his heroes and often became frustrated when reviewers criticized his protagonists as idealistic.

This frustration appears in certain documents that remain from Dickens’s correspondence with his friend (and eventual biographer) John Forster. In response to what must have been repeated scornful comments regarding the idealistic morality of his heroes, Dickens, in 1856, responded to the accusations against him, stating:

I have always a fine feeling of the honest state into which we have got, when some smooth gentleman says to me or to some one else when I am by, how odd it is that the hero of an English book is always uninteresting—too good—not natural; &c. ...But O my smooth friend, what a shining imposter you must think

yourself and what an ass you must think me, when you suppose that by putting a brazen face upon it you can blot out of my knowledge the fact that this same unnatural young gentleman (if to be decent is to be necessarily unnatural), whom you meet in...[my books], must be presented to you in that unnatural aspect by reason of your morality, and is not to have, I will not say any of the indecencies you like, but not even any of the experiences, trials, perplexities, and confusions inseparable from the making or unmaking of all men! (Forster 332)

Besides the sarcasm and venom that marks this passage, what also is interesting about it is that Dickens makes a clear distinction between English novels and everything else—and, more specifically, between English morality present in his writing and the type of immorality that appears in fiction from other countries. His particular emphasis on the “smooth gentleman” is telling, for never in a Dickens novel would a true gentleman be described as “smooth.” His aim in this letter is to expose the flawed reader, the man who through his “smooth[ness]” is, as Matthew Arnold might put it, “trick’d in disguises” and the epitome of inauthenticity (Arnold 21).

Dickens’s insistence that his heroes, no matter how idealistically moral they may appear, actually encounter all of the same “experiences, trials, perplexities, and confusions” that “mak[e] or unmak[e]...all men” implies that his expression of his heroes’ lives must contain some unifying aspect. Specifically, he links all of these characters to the nineteenth-century middle-class notion of morality, in a move that also, in turn, unifies the various levels of the middle class. Thinking of the heroes to whom he refers—Oliver Twist, Dick Swiveller, David Copperfield, Allan Woodcourt, and a host of others—one must also identify his comments as not only nationalistic in their insistence upon English morality but also specifically classist. Each of the idealized heroes from Dickens’s novels is a character who evolved out of the vast strata of the nineteenth-century middle class—and, more than anything else, Dickens’s protagonists overwhelmingly represent outstanding moral examples of middle-class citizens as a whole.

Though Dickens offers portraits of various members and levels of the middle class, his heroes appear to aspire to be a model for all of society to emulate.⁴ His combining of certain admirable traits within a single middle-class character is no accident and the choice to do so advocates for a type of unity among all middle-class citizens.

Dickens's attempts to unify such a large group of people together through a single concept such as morality is controversial today, for many scholars believe that the middle class during the nineteenth century was too massive a collection of incomes and strata of society to possibly look at them as a single group. Understanding the various levels of middle-class society and how authors attempted to combine them all within a collective category can be overwhelming—but not impossible. And to do so is essential to understanding Dickens's point that the middle class is not identified by income. Scholar Chris R. Vanden Bossche, in his essay "Class Discourse and Popular Agency in *Bleak House*," confronts the challenging question of how to define and discuss the Victorian middle class, essentially pointing out the idea that, when it comes to literature about the middle class, "[C]lass identities were not shaped by economic relationships alone, but rather were produced through a discursive field constituted by social mappings—models of class and class relationships—and by national narratives through which these mappings were explained and authorized" (10). Arguing with critics who define the middle class in strictly economic terms, Vanden Bossche correctly points out the complications of assigning simplistic characteristics to such a large number of people.

⁴ In a short but extremely valuable commentary at the beginning of the "Contexts" section of *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook on Charles Dickens's David Copperfield*, the editor explains that the idea of the hero consumed writers of the Victorian era. In particular, they were influenced by not only Thomas Carlyle's vision of the hero, but also by those presented in popular culture. The editor posits, "Concepts of manliness and heroism were important topics to Victorians.... Dickens...incorporate[s] and endorse[s] contemporary expectations of the hero and gentleman [in his novels]" (11).

Though they sometimes referred to themselves as the middle class, many of those designated in this economic bracket during the Victorian era subdivided themselves into the “middling classes”—a term that “always referred to a broad band of the population...[including] a vast strata of civil servants, teachers, doctors, lawyers, and government officials as well as the clerks and assistants which helped these institutions and services to operate” (Loftus). Obviously, those in the professions mentioned run the gamut from people who evidently made a lot of money to those who earned little income.⁵ The massive size of what constitutes the middle class complicates the critical discussion surrounding it, but some critics who take up the subject find value in exploring commonalities among the class as a unified group—something the Victorians often did as well.

Some of the most impressive contemporary studies of the Victorian middle class thus far (Leonore Davidoff’s and Catherine Hall’s *Family Fortunes* or John Tosh’s *A Man’s Place*, for example) rarely recognize the differentiation between the middling classes and what they categorize as the middle class as a whole. Instead, these authors combine attention to economic status with the defining aspects of shared culture (the “social mappings” and “national narratives” Vanden Bossche mentions) to argue that the idea of connecting all of these people together is valuable. As a designated group in society, the middle class was still relatively young during the nineteenth century, but it seems that the class as a whole has a recognition that it has come into its own, solidifying its image by placing into action not only financial qualifications for inclusionary status but also enforced moral and political standards. Defining oneself as

⁵ The Victorians struggled to define the middle classes, as well. Even as late as 1864, once the middle class had solidified as a visible group, a journalist from *The Examiner*, in an article titled “Which are the Middle Classes?”, explained that the class continued to grow, the boundaries of careers included in the middle-class also expanding in new directions. It included participants in various careers, and members of the middle classes had grown to “fifteen or sixteen millions” (627).

middle class went further than how much one earned; in other words, being middle class meant that one was not working class or upper class—and eventually these differences depended more upon pride in enforced modes of behavior than in economics. Certainly, many writers in the Victorian era discussed this body of people as a distinct entity in the same ways that some modern critics do, by combining attention to economic definition with cultural markers—usually attention to morality. In fact, the idea of morality serving as a glue that holds together and unifies the middling classes into a solidified party is a notion that appears frequently throughout almost the entire Victorian era, particularly in the literature produced during this time.

Vanden Bossche not only explains adequately why scholars gain valuable knowledge about the Victorian view point by looking at the middle class as a single unit but also details how the middle class went about seeing themselves in the exact same way. “In the 1830s and 1840s,” he points out, “English authors internalized the national narrative, reframing it as a confrontation and mediation between regional cultures and rewriting it in terms of narratives of class formation, in particular the opposed narratives of the rise of the middle class and the preservation of hierarchy” (12). But this phenomenon carried through to decades of the mid-nineteenth century. The idea of forming a “national narrative” around morality, specifically, shows up in nearly every printed document from the beginning of the Victorian era until approximately the mid-1870s, when morality as a collectively agreed upon value began to be attacked seriously on a massive scale. But for the Victorians living in the early and mid-points of the nineteenth century, they did not question the seemingly moral and divine right of middle-class rule. In the May 19, 1855, edition of the *Leader*, an author explains the power of the middle class in no uncertain terms, stating:

They are a part of the people, the flower of the people, and the natural leaders of the people...The history of social progress is a record of the struggles of the

middle classes in the cause of the people....It was in the boroughs of the middle classes that the banner was first raised to resistance to feudal tyranny, and of hope to the slave....The lower classes could not have done it for themselves...The middle classes, then, are the natural trustees of the cause of the people; and, though we are not blind to their shortcomings, we must say that, on the whole, they have fulfilled their trust generously, courageously, and well.

The author goes on to further isolate the middle class from the aristocracy, saying “The game of aristocrats is an easy one to play. It costs them only a little condescension and a few false words to win away the hearts of the people from their real defenders and true friends” (468). Tied to the middle class’s right to rule were several key ideas: morality, a work ethic, and the concept of authenticity that is easily enacted and identifiable by any other moral, hard-working, authentic Victorian middle-class citizen.

Though these ideas may be easily observed in mid-Victorian writings and popular culture, critics often fail to see the roots of these concepts in early Victorian authorship. Vanden Bossche, however, forces readers to rethink Dickens’s earlier works by tying this agenda to a particular decade (1830s-1840s). Suddenly, *Oliver Twist*, with all of its seeming simplicity, begins to look much more complicated when subjected to Vanden Bossche’s theory. Dickens is obsessed in his novels with examining not only class formation but also class survival.

Initializing his ideas in exactly the decade identified by Vanden Bossche, Dickens will refine his use of the orphaned character over and over again throughout his career, placing it in various situations of struggle and throwing obstacles in its path to survival. He begins to manipulate his orphans, changing them from echoes of picaresque, caricatured foundlings of the past into a unit symbolic of the anxious middle class, one that can either infect the novel’s world as a whole and bring about its downfall or one that can uphold the novel’s middle-class values and continue a legacy. As time progresses and the middle class’s position grows stronger and more secure, he manipulates the orphan character in different ways, still implying that without proper caution, the

middle class could fall. Dickens creates a new type of orphan story, and causes an interesting phenomenon to occur. Other authors of the period begin to react to his creations, and, as Dickens constantly shifts his orphan child's place and purpose, these other writers eventually take up the same character in a way that allows them to respond to Dickens's work in a type of creative criticism, in essence constructing a familial relationship with a continued conversation between novels of the early and mid-nineteenth century.

The orphans themselves begin as street children but eventually begin to take on other forms until they are finally verified members of the middle class; however, as individual plots demonstrate, the ultimate goal for each orphan, at least throughout most of the mid-nineteenth century, was to survive and become a thriving member of the middle class, capable of reproducing more successful generations. The use of the orphan character in such a way departs from the eighteenth-century literary orphan, because at the center of the orphan's eventual success or demise is the crucial adoption of the middle-class values of morality and authenticity. Without being able to adopt these virtues, the orphan character—and, by default, the middle class—is doomed. Dickens and other writers will place the same essential character, beginning with *Oliver Twist* who is revised over and over again, in various scenarios and create various outcomes for his future. But in the end, every orphaned character builds upon the original, adding complexity and even more defined contemporary Victorian concerns to its quest to succeed.

Chapter Summaries

Each of the novels that I will examine in this dissertation will point to the middle-class “national narrative” being constructed, first by Dickens and then revised and manipulated by other authors. Dickens’s *Oliver* is revised repeatedly into multiple versions that allow Victorian authors to discuss the middle class as a single unit. More importantly, they all use the same character (or revised character) to discuss a single issue: long-term survival of the middle class.

In the first chapter, I will examine two of Dickens’s earlier novels, *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*. I argue that beginning with the character of Oliver, Dickens begins to construct his ongoing symbol of the middle class through the orphan character. Though Oliver appears to be a mere caricature of previous orphan foundlings in eighteenth-century novels, Dickens molds Oliver into a contemporary synecdoche for the middle class, allowing the child to emphasize symbolically that class survival is possible if middle-class men cultivate authenticity and morality. Oliver’s eventual successful entrance into the Victorian middle class appears simplistic, but his story actually outlines a specific trajectory for masculine development (also outlined by John Tosh in *A Man’s Place*) during the early decades of the era. Through Oliver’s journey, readers witness Dickens attempting to create an origin for the middle class and establish grounds for its rightful inheritance of future success and longevity. All of the fears about middle-class failure culminate in Oliver’s story, and his success, once Dickens allows him to enter an established middle-class home and way of life, outlines an optimistic pathway for the middle class to emulate.

Though Oliver’s story sets the ground work for the goals of the Dickensian orphan narrative, Dickens’s novel *The Old Curiosity Shop*, published only a few years later, complicates matters. In this novel, Dickens revises Oliver into both males and females, but he gives the

female orphan, Little Nell, the privileged role of protagonist. In this novel, Dickens abandons all associations with his eighteenth-century predecessors and heightens Victorian fears about middle-class failure and destruction by forcing a female version of Oliver into her own journey to find a proper home. Unlike Oliver, Nell fails and ends up dying at the end. The move is puzzling, considering that Nell is just as moral and authentic as Oliver. An important difference between them, of course, is that Nell is female. She fails because she has no official home, the pure space in which she must remain sequestered, and must roam through various corrupt landscapes that eventually strip her of her connection with the domestic. While Dickens briefly touches upon the importance of women, the domestic, and their role in masculine development in *Oliver Twist*, he makes clear in *The Old Curiosity Shop* that intact female authenticity and connection with the domestic must be maintained in order for the middle class to survive. Readers see Nell's role more clearly when they view how her character relates to other orphans—such as Kit, Dick, and Sally, specifically—in the novel. These characters illustrate risks to the survival of the middle class if both male authenticity and female authenticity are not developed and maintained.

In Chapter Two, I examine how female authors begin to revise Little Nell's plot into their own novels. Recognizing Nell's destruction as an injustice, two unconventional women—Emily Brontë and George Eliot—seek to find a way for Nell to endure her wandering and become a female capable of survival and reproduction. In their novels *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mill on the Floss*, respectively, their reincarnations of Nell become associated with Gypsiness, a trope used by these two women to represent itinerancy as aberrant behavior that combines with dangerous sexual expression. Unlike Nell, their heroines embrace itinerancy rather than try to fight it, and this aspect of their characters engages interestingly with their status as orphans. Both

Catherine Earnshaw and Maggie Tulliver stray from the home, adopt itinerancy and sexual freedom as a way of life, and orphan themselves from society (even though they are already orphans in fact after certain points in the novels). Yet both authors remain committed to a middle-class ethos and force themselves to sacrifice the radicalness of their versions of Little Nell. As seen in their books, the female middle-class orphan who contains elements of Gypsiness cannot be allowed to live because she poses a threat to the survival of her family and society in general—and she can cause the Olivers around her to fall, too.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë recreates Nell in two characters: Isabella Linton and Catherine Earnshaw. Nell can be aligned closely with Isabella Linton, who consciously wanders from her home, is tainted by her Gypsy lifestyle, and later dies due to the experience. Catherine Earnshaw, however, becomes the most frightening reincarnation of the Dickens character, for she enthusiastically adopts Heathcliff's Gypsy lifestyle and outlook, willingly abandoning her home in favor of itinerancy. A close reading of the story reveals that it is actually Catherine who is the authentic Gypsy, and it is this aspect of her character that is most dangerous and allows her to destroy everything that she touches—including herself. Strangely enough, Heathcliff, the character most physically linked with Gypsiness, becomes a reimagined Oliver Twist who thrives when away from the corrupt females in the novel but who falters under their influence. In the end, Brontë affirms Dickens's point in *The Old Curiosity Shop*: association with corrupt females who wander from the home bring about the downfall of men and, by extension, the Victorian middle class.

Like Brontë's Catherine Earnshaw, Eliot's Maggie Tulliver is associated early on in the novel with Gypsiness, but Eliot is not as harsh in her treatment of Maggie as Brontë is of Catherine. Though Maggie is a rambunctious child made an outcast by her looks (which are

compared to those of a Gypsy), Eliot turns her into a nearly model teenaged girl who is devoted to her family and domestic life. Eliot appears to be rewriting the fate of Nell in spite of the fact that the child version of Maggie had a propensity to wander, but once Maggie reaches sexual maturity, things begin to change. She begins to fight her role within the home, and, once she is orphaned in fact during adolescence, her Gypsy nature resurfaces. In the end, like Nell and Catherine before her, she must die, and, also like her predecessors, she must destroy the middle-class men around her, forcing all of those males who were associated with her to either die or become infertile. In the end, both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mill on the Floss* reinforce Dickens's earlier narrative about the wandering female orphan, but their dramatic plots about female itinerant orphans heighten the fact that there is no room for women to change or deviate from middle-class norms—and those who do threaten the stability and future of the middle class.

The role of proper gendered behavior is taken up once again in Chapter Three, which examines how Dickens progresses his orphan narrative to become not only instruction for individual behavior that will ensure middle-class success but also advice for how England as a nation should operate to guarantee its long-term survival. By the time Dickens writes his mid-century novels, the middle class is established and in control of many aspects of the nation. When orphans appear in these later stories, they symbolize the middle-class nation rather than the middle-class individual, highlighting problems that could threaten the middle class's power or serving as examples of proper behavior of middle-class citizens that ensures the strengthening of England as a country. Readers first see Dickens's change in how he manipulates the orphan figure in the 1853 *A Child's History of England*, a seldom examined text that actually reveals the depiction of England and its common people as an orphan subject to the whim of horrible rulers who violate middle-class behavioral standards. Dickens makes clear through his examples of

terrible monarchs through history that, without middle-class values ruling the country, England can never succeed to its full potential. He continues this line of argument in his novel *Bleak House*, written at the same time as the *Child's History*, refining his message that England's ruling class—now the middle class—must transform the government into one run according to middle-class values. The failed Oliver Twists and Little Nell's populating the story meet various fates, but there are also successful versions of these characters as well. The combined stories of the novel's orphans, and their various outcomes, emphasize that, should England's people *and* government adopt the middle-class values of authenticity and morality, the country will thrive and change from a disintegrating and chaotic wasteland into a fertile and optimistic world of possibilities. The success of such a transformation can be seen at the ending of the novel, when the story's literal orphans are peacefully settled and thriving, while the fog over England, the metaphorical orphan of the narrative, has lifted. Under such a strong middle-class influence, England becomes strong and stable, and there seems to be no problem that the English cannot overcome at the end of the story.

The secure positioning of England and its middle class found at the end of *Bleak House* drives the further transformation of the orphan narrative by other authors as time progresses. In Chapter Four, I analyze two novels appearing nearly ten years after *Bleak House* was written. Wilkie Collins's *No Name* and Anthony Trollope's *The Small House at Allington* show how middle-class concerns alter once class security has been attained. As represented in these two novels, women become less of a concern because female authenticity is no longer necessary to transform or change men in a Victorian world that is becoming increasingly male dominated. In *No Name*, the wandering female (and most aberrant version of Little Nell to date) no longer presents a risk to society or authentic men, in fact finding salvation and redemption through the

influence of an authentic man to the point that she is allowed finally to survive and potentially procreate. Collins's decision to allow a positive fate to an otherwise fallen and orphaned woman who would have been forced to die in an earlier novel speaks to the stability of the mid-century middle-class population.

Collins's plot, though dominated by a woman, remains subject to a man, and it is this increasingly masculine plot that is revealed in Anthony Trollope's *The Small House at Allington*. Though many readers focus on the domestic aspects of the novel and the ill-fated love affairs described, Trollope obviously intended for the novel to be a man's story all along. The hero of the novel is Johnny Eames, and his story, like that of *Oliver Twist*'s, is about his journey to manhood. Unlike Oliver, however, who had to experience aspects of the domestic (and a supposed return to the domestic) to become a man, Johnny Eames can only become a real man when he abandons the domestic and the society of women completely. The new goal and final stage of Victorian masculinity turns away from the acquisition of a home to the earned status of becoming a professional in the masculine world of business. Trollope's story, though reluctantly, drops its connection with the domestic world, and, as a result, the orphan narrative changes forever.

By the 1870s, the emphasis on domesticity in novels declines, and the orphan plot moves into new territory. Though the orphan still stands in as a representative of something English, his function changes, and he comes to symbolize even less of an individual and more of an English force in the Empire. No longer is the literary orphan's purpose meant to show the pathway to proper middle-class formation or even the means of class survival. Instead, the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century orphan story becomes one about promoting nationalism abroad within an all-male world. The genre of boy's adventure fiction replaces middle-class

novels about domesticity and professionalization, and women disappear from these narratives almost completely, with men embodying English might on foreign soil. Still, even though these novels do not promote the same goal at play within Dickens's novels, one can still trace the literary ancestry of characters found in novels such as *Treasure Island* or *The Complete Stalky and Co.* back to their Dickensian roots by looking at the trajectory of orphanhood as it is depicted in novels during the Victorian era.

THE ORPHAN'S PROGRESS BEGINS:

OLIVER TWIST AND THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

Many of Charles Dickens's protagonists are orphans, but most innovative is how his orphans comment upon class and survival. Though his orphan characters alter throughout his canon to reflect specific contemporary concerns, such as reactions to laws or as commentary on philanthropic organizations, these characters also consistently maintain a principle function in his stories that goes beyond simplistic commentary or a desire to elicit sympathy.¹ Many of his novels offer a microcosm of the Victorian world, and the orphans in these books become purposeful symbols of the middle class. They are not isolated figures simply meant to wring a tear or two from readers who feel sympathy towards their struggles. Instead, these characters function to verbalize the overwhelming anxiety of the middle class that thematically seeps through Dickens's novels: though we are successful now—though we practically control the country—will our power last? Particularly, how can we justify our power when our class is without long-established roots or origins?

¹ Dickens, of course, was able to use his characters to elicit an emotional response. As explained in Paul Schlicke's *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, "In his sympathy for the underprivileged, Dickens was acutely conscious that there was much they could not do for themselves to improve their condition. ...[The poor had] problems beyond the power of the lower classes to correct,...[and] improvement [of their condition] depended on the vision and altruism of their betters" (212). By creating characters like Oliver Twist or the street sweeper Jo, who appear pathetic in the streets of London, he absolutely did capture the reader's attention to act on behalf of the poor. However, Dickens also never loses sight of his role as a middle-class man seeking to stabilize and secure the future of the middle class. Even Oliver Twist, as this chapter will show, is a middle-class child, and, at least within the confines of the narrative, nothing changes for those most impoverished within the novel's pages.

Two of his earlier novels, *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, show the evolution of Dickens's use of the orphan as a metaphor or symbol for discussing his concerns about the long-term survival of the middle class. He examines the struggle to survive through the various experiences of orphans in these two novels in similar ways, creating revision after revision of the same story. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens attempts to sculpt the traditional eighteenth-century orphan story into a new version. *Oliver Twist* is not simply a narrative about an orphan surviving incredible odds against him; instead, it becomes the tale of how a class that feels illegitimate itself can survive. The novel has shortcomings, however, and may appear to some readers as overly simplistic in its outcome. Dickens, too, recognized the problem of his early novel and complicated it in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Rather than a failed narrative, as some critics suggest, this later story is actually a more mature attempt at revising the first novel (and eighteenth-century orphan tales) into a strikingly contemporary story that comments directly on the Victorian middle class.

In this chapter, I will examine *Oliver Twist*'s parallels and differences with its literary ancestors from the eighteenth century, followed by an examination of Dickens's attempts to reconstruct that tale into a story that outlines the problems inherent with that century's value system (which is based upon sincerity and taste). Readers witness Dickens's successive revisions of the generic orphan story, first noticing how he transforms the eighteenth-century orphan narrative that concentrates upon cultivating taste and discovering a bloodline into a nineteenth-century story about endorsing middle-class authenticity and teaching the importance of morality. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens molds Oliver into a synecdoche for the middle class that emphasizes the hope for that class's long-term survival if male authenticity is cultivated.

Dickens eventually revises the simplicity of Oliver's story, working his tale into a more sophisticated version of a new kind of orphan story in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In this novel, all association with the eighteenth-century orphan tale is abandoned. Instead, shaping his orphan tale into something particularly Victorian, Dickens gives readers an advanced and considerably darker version of his concerns about the potential of middle-class destruction. Using, once again, the trope of orphanhood to convey these fears, Dickens emphasizes that development of male authenticity is not enough to ensure class survival. Instead, a version of female authenticity must also be cultivated. By examining the orphans Kit, Dick, Sally, and Nell, readers see a much clearer vision of Dickens's attempts to tell a contemporary story that he first essayed in *Oliver Twist*. These characters symbolize the middle class just as Oliver does in his novel, but this time Dickens shows the risk to middle-class survival if both male authenticity *and* female authenticity are not culturally bred and maintained. Both novels emphasize the risk to middle-class survival, but, while the outcome in *Oliver Twist* is assuredly optimistic, Dickens, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, begins to develop his thesis that if the middle class does not embrace morality and authenticity as a sustained belief system then the class is doomed to failure.

Oliver Twist as a New Type of Orphan

Bloodlines never are truly in jeopardy in novels like *Tom Jones*; and, though male orphans in these stories may be barred from gaining their rightful inheritance during their youth, the outcome as to their identity and right to wealth and property are inevitable. The male orphan in the eighteenth-century novel might face moments of danger or experience lewd encounters, but his fate is almost never at risk, because usually lurking somewhere in his background is a

connection with an esteemed, wealthy family member.² Along the course of the child's life, identifiable physical features link him to his true family and seal his fate as a rightful inheritor.

On the surface, *Oliver Twist* appears to share many similarities with eighteenth-century orphan or foundling stories, especially in terms of its emphasis on inheritance and genetics. Oliver's facial features remind other legitimate key characters of his true parentage; his future is, indeed, ensured by his bloodline; and, though he experiences what could be called adventures within the country and the city, he always finds his way to safety.

In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens has not quite developed the perspective he will come to articulate more strongly in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, but he experiments with ideas of middle-class survival in *Oliver Twist* by taking an old story and turning it into something new. In recasting Oliver as a different type of orphan with a fresh agenda, he must construct the story in predictable ways that contain subtle differences. And, in order for the reader to understand his novel intentions with the character of Oliver, one must first examine the events and other characters of the story in whole. In doing so, one finds that there are parallel orphan stories

² As explained by Lisa Zunshine in *Bastards and Foundlings: Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century England*, the narrative of the foundling who comes to discover that he is the offspring of a wealthy member of the upper class is very different from that of the orphan or foundling of middle-class parentage in eighteenth-century literature. Though the middle-class foundling/orphan story is not as popular as that of the wealthy foundling during the eighteenth century, one should note important differences between their outcomes. The wealthy orphan or foundling is assured of an easy transition into society, whereas the middle-class orphan or foundling is not. There were differences in "attitudes and social practices" between the "nobility and those of the middle class" (138). Usually, because the middle class, even by the end of the eighteenth century, began to be defined by differences in approaches to moral questions, the fictional orphans and foundlings of middle-class birth experienced hardship or, sometimes, death.

running together in the novel: that of Rose Maylie, Oliver's aunt, and the story of Oliver himself.³

Dickens prepares the reader for Oliver's story within a crude revision of the eighteenth-century female orphan's tale. Rose's character, though not completely developed, is crucial in understanding the fascinating ways in which Dickens revises the male eighteenth-century orphan plot in *Oliver*. Like Oliver, her background is shadowy and she cannot advance in the world until all comes to light. Complicating Rose's story, however, is her gender and her necessary presence in the home that is quickly becoming revered by Victorians, who saw a pure, authentic domestic space as crucial to properly developing children and morality. Upon closer examination, this is why Rose's story necessarily must be resolved before one may properly understand Dickens's ideas he attempts to develop in *Oliver*.

Rose is like many of her literary predecessors. Female eighteenth-century fictional orphans and foundlings are somewhat more complicated than their male counterparts. While male orphans in these novels may not realize their social identity or parentage, and many times are bastards in fact, they still prosper at the end of their tales. The female orphans, on the other hand, whether orphaned by tragic circumstances or because they are bastards, face social obstacles their male counterparts do not.⁴ They might have adventures, but, for the most part,

³ It is not a novel idea to consider Rose Maylie as a character whose story runs parallel to that of *Oliver Twist*'s. In the article "'The Parish Boy's Progress': The Evolving Form of *Oliver Twist*," author William T. Lankford reveals that Rose helps readers prepare for Oliver's outcome. He says, "Th[e] polarization of values in the novel's evolving morality results largely from Dickens' idealization of Rose. Nothing earlier has prepared the way for the unqualified goodness she represents; from her first appearance she violates the conventions of characterization and conditions of existence established through the previous context of the novel" (23).

⁴ A good example is the title character of Frances Burney's *Evelina*. As Lisa Zunshine argues, "Burney had to be quite careful in allowing her novel to articulate the familiar anxiety about the distribution of the family resources among legitimate and illegitimate children" (132). *Evelina* must carefully monitor her behavior in order to succeed in the novel—and the means to her

they avoid the seedy world of Tom Jones's escapades. Their objective is to find the successful outcome Tom Jones experiences at the end of his novel, which includes fortune and marriage. In other words, the goal of the female eighteenth-century orphan revolves around securing a successful marriage. This plot, however, does not eliminate feminine participation in eighteenth-century commodity culture. Not only do these females participate in the system and learn to adapt to popular taste, they themselves are objects of commerce and taste. Because her ultimate objective is marriage, the husband who chooses her must see his future wife as a proper, tasteful thing to be acquired and she must add to his participation in cultivating proper taste. Her choice of a husband is crucial as well, for he must be able to continue or elevate her standard of living (usually upper or upper-middle class).

Just as in the eighteenth-century female orphan plot, Rose's story advances toward her eventual marriage to Henry Maylie, but her narrative differs a bit from an eighteenth-century orphaned heroine in important ways. Rose and the audience both desire her marriage, but her goal beforehand must be to discover her true lineage and to behave properly and authentically in relation to that lineage. In the beginning, Rose knows only that she is an orphan and she feels tremendous shame about this fact, refusing to marry until she discovers her true heritage. Before she can be allowed to marry and reproduce with a legitimate and successful middle-class male, she must develop into a figure of authenticity who ensures her reputation and purity before she successfully joins the middle class as a verified member.

success must come through her acknowledgement as a member of the upper class and her marriage to a legitimate member of her class. As Zunshine explains, "Evelina is...unfit for any social existence unless her legitimacy is reaffirmed" publically (136). The tension surrounding a female character like Evelina is the fact that she must marry and bear legitimate children. Her struggle to find her place in the world is very different from someone like Tom Jones, who can commit any number of vulgar acts and social missteps without being penalized for it in the end.

Interestingly, Rose's transformation emerges in the same way as Oliver's most significant moment of change will occur—through illness. It is not until Dickens forces Rose to endure an illness that he allows her character to progress properly. In a symbolic act of purification, Rose sheds her naïve approach to the world. Before confronting reality, Rose is inactive, however; without the ability to contemplate her questionable birth and how her circumstances actually affect her future, she only stands in as a stereotype of ideal femininity. She simply flits from scene to scene, sighing about Oliver's situation and submitting to those around her without question—a benign, inactive entity in the novel.

Dickens heightens the frivolity of her existence in the moments before she falls ill. Rose, her aunt, and Oliver take a walk in “unusually warm” weather, on a path that “far exceeded their ordinary bounds” (256). These extreme circumstances rapidly draw Rose to a cathartic experience that will either kill her if she is too weak to survive or that will force her to recognize the truth of herself in a way that she can handle (and, therefore, emerge successfully).

The extreme experience alters Rose, and she cannot concentrate on the daily events. In a physical and emotional response, Dickens shows Rose's world beginning to disintegrate. She admits that something is amiss, saying, ““I would not alarm you if I could avoid it...but indeed I have tried very hard, and cannot help this. I fear I *am* ill, aunt”” (257). It is the first moment of truth for Rose. Before this time, she quietly submitted to every decision around her and never made any movement on her own. Her days of living childishly, however, are over and she must either enter adulthood or die. Rose, expressing that “she has tried very hard” to cover up her illness (that, symbolically, has been there all along in her reluctance to face her true heritage), feels powerless in the inevitable forced experience. Her inability to choose another path—for she “cannot help this” reaction—proves that the authentic experience must win out over performed

sincerity, even if it leads to death. The illness forces her to realize her purpose, for later, in her refusal of Henry's proposal, she ends up admitting the precarious foundation of her existence. Realistically confronting her future gives her a sense of feminine authenticity and maturity absent in her character before.

Before her illness, Dickens alludes to the fact that Henry had enjoyed a childish flirtation and looked forward to a union with Rose, never taking into account Rose's possible illegitimacy. The two juvenile lovers mimicked their eventual domestic roles in the Maylie household, pretending as children would that they are to live happily ever after. When Rose awakens from her illness, she recognizes that she is now a woman and that, because she is, she could be placing future generations of Maylies in jeopardy if she makes sincere or emotional decisions rather than decisions made out of adherence to authentic beliefs.

As she recovers from her fever and encounters Henry again, Henry describes her as an "angel" (277), and, as such, she recognizes in her maturity that, before she can become a Victorian domestic angel, she has "a duty that [she] must perform." She, in a newly mature and adult move, addresses Henry bluntly, stating, "I, a friendless, portionless girl, with a blight upon my name, should not give your friends reason to suspect that I had sordidly yielded to your first passion, and fastened myself, a clog, on all your hopes and projects. I owe it to you and yours, to prevent you from opposing, in the warmth of your generous nature, this great obstacle to your progress in the world" (279). Rose's emphasis in this address is on her own feminine reputation and Henry's "hopes" and "progress." Dickens mixes domestic morality with the world of commerce to show that both must be present before the middle class can survive. Commerce in *Oliver Twist* is tied to authentic morality and the domestic—not sincerity and taste. It is only when Rose discovers that her background will not be a "blight" upon anyone's name that she

agrees to marry Henry. Literally, she is practicing a type of birth control in this decision. She enforces a strict morality for herself that is completely devoid of sexuality and not “sordid” because she recognizes that without her feminine moral role she will hinder her husband’s “progress in the world.” Forcing her to act in this way, Dickens shows that he already sees the important role women must play in the domestic that will, in turn, affect the masculine world of business.

As John Tosh explains in *A Man’s Place*, the properly authentic male, in his final stage of development, must return to the home and create his ideal domestic space by choosing a wife who can properly cultivate that space. The home, ideally, grounded men and provided a moral foundation that they would then take out into the public world of commerce (therefore making the public world moral). If the space created and managed by a woman is not ideal, if she is corrupted in any way, then that corruption will seep out into the public space. Therefore, her role is strangely crucial in the Victorian world of commerce because she has the power to make men remain authentic and moral—or to distract them and lead them to act inappropriately when out of her presence. Dickens allowing a female character to recognize this system in a novel as early as *Oliver Twist* indicates that he wishes to direct an agenda within his stories—especially in his use of orphaned characters. Rose, like Oliver, continues to show up as an ideal Dickens builds upon and revises throughout his work until he resolves completely how society should approach orphans. She functions as a model for all femininity in a class that feels orphaned. Dickens presents through her character an early optimistic vision that women of the middle class can do just as much as men to ensure its survival. As it turns out, Rose’s redemption is just as important as, and significantly related to, Oliver’s. Consequently, it is no mistake that the two are pictured together at the end of the novel, emblems of successful middle-class endurance and survival.

A. Oliver as a Synecdoche of the Middle Class

Rose Maylie is one early attempt to update the eighteenth-century orphan plot, but Dickens vigorously revises that story through Oliver. Goldie Morgentaler, in *Dickens and Heredity*, readily admits that Oliver retains strong ties with his eighteenth-century literary ancestors, but she also explains that heredity is a characteristically messy subject in Dickens to the point that linear inheritance of qualities is usually not a factor in his characters' makeups. Still, she believes that Oliver's character is predictable due to his similarities with previous literary orphans, calling him "[t]he first avatar of childish goodness" in Dickens's body of work. Oliver's good blood, she explains, ultimately saves him, and Oliver "remains the quintessential little gentleman, a model of honesty and integrity whose character is untouched by his environment and unblemished by the slightest hint of moral stain" (37). The child, though he may have to endure trials of the body and life, never confronts a true test of his spirit in Morgentaler's opinion—a plot device quite similar to the way blood inheritance works in eighteenth-century stories. But her wording about this issue is intriguing. Claiming that Oliver remains "untouched" and "unblemished" by all immorality is an interesting concept. Though in many earlier tales about orphans a positive outcome depended upon a blood connection and simply "sow[ing]...wild oats," it seems that in this novel there is a significant shift in how Oliver's fate will be resolved—and it has to do with behavior rather than genetics (Zunshine 92).

Dickens's manipulation of how blood inheritance works within *Oliver Twist* becomes important because of how Victorians valued morality and authenticity, and it results in Oliver becoming a character that symbolizes the middle class as a whole in a way not fully realized within Rose's character. His parents loved one another, and, rather than because they simply

inherited the genes from good family lines, it is their love, not their name, that ensures a good product. This narrative choice emphasizes an emotional rather than physical inheritance, and it is the first significant shift in Dickens's recasting of the eighteenth-century orphan narrative, because learned inheritance rather than biological inheritance is stressed.

On the surface, the story of Oliver's conception violates Victorian moral codes. As Morgentaler points out, Oliver is "illegitimate...[a fact in the novel that] puts an interesting twist on what would otherwise be a most unimaginative portrayal of virtue" (38). But it is with this authorial decision that Dickens merges the importance of bloodline with learned morality. Blood inheritance of positive virtues in Dickens depends upon moral intent during the act of copulation rather than the physical merging of two people from esteemed backgrounds. Yet—and this is another departure from many of his eighteenth-century orphaned predecessors—Oliver is not a member of a necessarily esteemed background. He is "a member of the middle class. What Oliver inherits from his parents is more than just their moral essence, it is their moral essence as defined by their social class" (Morgentaler 39). Therefore, if Oliver's successful outcome results from a background based on class values rather than genetics, then Dickens is manipulating an old story into something extremely contemporary. Morality can only be learned—not passed along through the gene pool; but Dickens seems to propose that properly authentic and moral couples can produce an offspring prone to learning and embracing morality more easily than others. The middle class as a whole is crucial to this process. It must cultivate a group system of belief that can be embraced by those who are born into the system or adopted into it. If the standardized system of morality is in place and accepted, it provides an origin for a class that is relatively young and trying to legitimize itself in the world.

In this scenario, *Oliver Twist* becomes less an orphan's survival narrative and instead becomes the narrative of the survival of an emerging class that often feels orphaned, if not illegitimate, and Oliver is the first concentrated Dickensian symbol of this anxiety. Money and business ventures, as many middle-class citizens of the Victorian era recognize, could be ephemeral marks of status, but it is Oliver's cultivation of morality and authenticity that will save him—not his bloodline or monetary inheritance.

B. The Parish Boy's Progress: Oliver as a Middle-Class Model

The word “progress” appears not only in Rose's speech to Henry but also in the subtitle to the novel. Oliver's story is literally the “Parish Boy's Progress,” and the term “progress” is essential to maintaining the driving force of commerce while also indicating the overarching theme of survival that is present in the story. Many critics have pointed to connections between *Oliver Twist* and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*,⁵ a narrative that in some ways embodies the same search for moral purpose as Dickens's does. In fact, in Bunyan's story, Christian's “progress” has much to do with overcoming a sense of orphanhood, for he states his purpose clearly: “I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away” (17). Though the purpose of Bunyan's story reflects a very different time period and religious agenda, the language used adequately summarizes Oliver's and the middle class's own search. Christian, like Oliver and like the Victorian middle class, hopes to obtain an “inheritance” that is solid, stable, and pure. Oliver's own progress crosses literary boundaries and identifies new standards

⁵ For an extensive examination of the relationship between Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and many other Victorian works, including *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, please see Barry V. Qualls's *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction: The Novel as Book of Life* (Cambridge UP, 1982).

of behavior and expectations for the nineteenth century, and his narrative as a (eventual) middle-class boy progressing in the world transforms into a story about middle-class self-fashioning.

Dickens allows Oliver, in his journeys and adventures, to experience each of the crucial stages of masculine development as identified by Tosh, constantly looking forward to Oliver's future and always questioning: "Can the child turn out successfully, or will he be destroyed along the way?" In many ways, survival is a theme that underlies Tosh's belief in proper middle-class male development. In his chapter "Father and Child," for example, he explains that middle-class fatherhood during the nineteenth century allowed for the achievement of the goals men needed to meet in order to acquire Victorian masculinity, not the least of which included "secur[ing] the satisfaction of fulfilling a crucial criterion of adult masculinity—the ability to feed, clothe and shelter children." The role of the father, he goes on to say, not only affects the present, but also ensures the progression and endurance of the middle class: "The child who was successfully raised to the point of a good marriage or a respectable occupation brought social reputation to the father" (101). Tosh's identification of the crucial, yet basic, human needs to be provided to offspring—that of "[food], cloth[ing] and shelter"—become linked with his emphasis on both immediate survival and on future survival as they are connected with the development of a respected "social reputation." The need to secure the future reputation, or the authenticity, of the middle-class male (related also to how he is able to provide for his children) indicates a need to prove validity to the rest of society.

Basic survival is an issue from the first page of Dickens's narrative. In relating Oliver's earliest history, Dickens's focus centers on the child's most basic needs. Oliver survives infancy, "[fighting]" with "Nature" and winning (1-2). It is especially significant that Oliver's identity issues begin in this moment. Literally, he is a member of the middle class (though illegitimate

and though no one knows this yet); but, even though he will later be identified with them, Oliver spends most of his time as a vulnerable child struggling against a system organized and enforced by the middle class in a way that forces him to prove himself worthy of attention. The type of middle-class citizen Oliver will come to represent starts off in the right. Because his final outcome is positive, these early struggles indicate that the good must rise above the corrupt.

After establishing that Oliver is capable of physical survival at birth, Dickens places him in situations where the boy must struggle for basic needs. He must learn to overcome these challenges and independently sustain himself before his story may be resolved, and an example of this kind of test appears in the famous workhouse scene when Oliver asks “for more.” Though immortalized in everything from stage productions to parodies, this incident boils down to two very important concepts: survival and status. Oliver must learn to provide for himself not only in order to survive in his present but also so that he can survive in the future—and successfully produce another generation of middle-class citizens in England. The child’s body needs more sustenance to survive; however the horror that accompanies his asking “for more” indicates that he wishes to shed his prescribed identification with the working class who should never ask for more. Oliver’s struggles to obtain food for survival are resolved at various points, but as soon as that concern is diminished Oliver finds himself fighting to make himself a visible presence—and being seen as a viable, competitive middle-class citizen depends largely upon dress.⁶ Clothing

⁶ As explained by Clair Hughes in *Dressed in Fiction*, class consciousness informed dress during the Victorian era. She argues, “Victorian men retain for us the popular image of men in suits, conformists with whiskers and top-hats. But that is only vulgar modern prejudice: for them, as always in the modern world, dress is a form of consumption, a badge of class, a possible mark of originality and a form of self-creation. Even for the Victorians (or perhaps especially for the Victorians) it is of interest and importance. In the troubled world of the male Victorian Bildungsroman, dress may be a key index of the social chaos of modernity” (47).

visually marks a person's status, but as Dickens will prove, visual markers of status are not enough.

From the beginning, Dickens complicates Oliver's visual identification. When Oliver emerges into the world he appears exactly the same as every other child born, rich or poor.

Dickens explains this, stating:

What an excellent example of the power of dress, young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket that had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to assign him his proper station in society. But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none. (3)

The “power of dress” becomes extremely complicated, even at this early stage in the novel.

Oliver can be anyone at this point, a new species so unidentifiable that even “it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have assigned him his proper station in society”—a problem that the many members of the vast middle class faced. Dickens's phrasing, however, is very contemporary. The middle class itself had problems defining exactly what it was supposed to be. Oliver remains in a childish and dependent state, “badged and ticketed,” until he runs away in a journey that marks his first conscious and mature step of entering the competitive world of middle-class survival. Unknown to anyone, he struggles to attain acknowledgment. He has no resources nor does he see anyone he can turn to for help until a “strange young gentleman” shows up and offers assistance—and who also offers Oliver his first lesson in the importance of dress as a sign of authenticity.

When “the artful Dodger” appears, he successfully impersonates the visual markers of a “gentleman” to Oliver. Oliver is not worldly enough or mature enough to see through the disguise that the Dodger tries to enact, but his trust of him, however misguided, indicates that

Oliver is drawn internally to the middle class. Within the primary encounter between the Dodger and Oliver, Dickens shifts between calling the Dodger “a young gentleman” and “[t]he strange boy,” and he wonders over the young man’s appearance (56-58). The confusion over how to identify him mimics Oliver’s own problem of identification after birth and his confusion during the present moment as to how to receive the young man who “had about him all the airs and manners of a man...[with] a hat [that] was stuck on the top of his head so lightly, that it threatened to fall off every moment...[who] wore a man’s coat, which reached nearly to his heels...[and had] turned the cuffs back, half-way up his arm, to get his hands out of the sleeves: apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the pockets of his corduroy trousers, for there he kept them” (57). The Dodger has the dress of the gentleman (as second-hand, ill-fitting, or shabby as that dress might be) and Oliver, mistakenly, is persuaded. The “artful” boy embodies everything that is wrong with the eighteenth-century valued mode of behavior. Oliver’s questioning and confusion prove that he is a creature driven by authenticity, but he does not yet possess the skills firmly to decide who is authentic and who is a pretender. The Dodger serves as a warning: no matter what the visual markers, if one does not embody authenticity then one isn’t truly a member of the middle class and could prove dangerous.

One day, however, Oliver sees a properly “respectable-looking personage, with a powdered head and gold spectacles...dressed in a bottle-green coat with a black velvet collar; [wearing] white trousers; and carr[ying] a smart bamboo cane under his arm.” Mr. Brownlow, unsuspecting of the fact that he is about to be the victim of a crime, stands at a bookseller’s stall as Oliver observes the many markers of middle-class respectability that come through in his appearance. Brownlow’s dress is a solid marker of his true station in life—his clothing fits—and he is shopping, essentially participating in the world of commerce as a proper middle-class man

should. Unlike the Dodger, whose clothing is baggy and who steals for a living, nothing about the old man's appearance as a gentleman is a sham. Instead, his dress is an authentic mirror of exactly who and what he is.

Oliver's encounter with Mr. Brownlow significantly alters the course of his life, but it also forces him to embark on a new type of boyhood—that of the proper middle-class male child. He recognizes that the Dodger and others living in the faux middle-class environment with Fagin lack morality, and, horrified and repelled, he runs from this lifestyle that emphasizes performance. It is a crucial decision on Dickens's part to allow Oliver to choose for himself the option of leaving Fagin's gang when the time comes for him to adopt their corrupt customs as his own. Realizing with all of his being that he is in the wrong world, Oliver finally understands the business he has been set out to do is not respectable, and his reaction is one of stunned and horrified shock:

What was Oliver's horror and alarm as he stood a few paces off, looking on with his eyelids as wide open as they would possibly go, to see the Dodger plunge his hand into the old gentleman's pocket, and draw from thence a handkerchief! ... In an instant the whole mystery of the handkerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels, and the Jew, rushed upon the boy's mind. He stood, for a moment, with the blood so tingling through all his veins from terror, that he felt as if he were in a burning fire; then, confused and frightened, he took to his heels; and, not knowing what he did, made off as fast as he could lay his feet to the ground. (73-74)

The passage is telling on many levels, for Oliver is confronted not only with his first encounter with a true gentleman in Mr. Brownlow but also with a new instinctual response—a response born of morality. The “whole mystery of the handkerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels, and the Jew” that he came across in Fagin's home has been solved. All of the items are markers of middle-class male dress. However, Dickens's insertion of revelatory knowledge about “the Jew” also affects Oliver. The information is significant and flows naturally, almost as stream-of-

consciousness, from the word “jewels.” The association between the items and the dishonest caricature of the Jew speaks to many issues in Victorian studies, but it also importantly denotes a clear demarcation between that which is and is not gentlemanly.⁷ Oliver associates the items with a group of people like the “old gentleman”—whom he recognizes instantly as such—and this causes a surprising reaction in Oliver.

Oliver’s horror and instinctual response of morality winning over vice (to the point that he runs from the immoral enterprise) mirrors the intended victim’s response. It is at this point in the novel that Oliver’s story most vividly seems to mimic the eighteenth-century orphan story in terms of associating goodness or a good outcome with the bloodline or inherited physical features. Mr. Brownlow says, ““There is something in that boy’s face...something that touches and interests me...Where have I seen something like that look before?”” (77) Of course, the resolution is that Oliver is a relative and he recognizes his own family in Oliver’s face. Dickens, however, seems to be proclaiming something more profound in this moment. The genuine reaction of Oliver translated into a type of authenticity that Mr. Brownlow could not ignore. Though Brownlow called for Oliver’s arrest, as soon as he confronts him face-to-face, Brownlow appeals for kindness in the officer’s treatment of Oliver. He pleads with the policemen not to “hurt” the child, and even questions his own accusations, saying, “I am not sure that this boy actually took the handkerchief...*Can* he be innocent? He looked like—Bye the bye. Bless my soul!—where have I seen something like that look before?” (76-77) In a reversal from Oliver’s own experience with the Dodger, Brownlow successfully identifies Oliver as a gentleman—at least one in the making. His confusion results from looking at an undeveloped version of

⁷ For more information about Jewish stereotypes in English literature, and an in-depth discussion about Fagin as a caricature in *Oliver Twist*, see Edgar Rosenberg’s *From Shylock to Svengali: Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (Stanford University Press, 1960).

Oliver's authenticity and dress; but, Brownlow senses Oliver's true nature. The innate goodness in the child indicates the true key to his survival, an authenticity that is later backed up through a validation of his hereditary background.

Oliver's goodness, morality, and willingness to readily adapt to the middle-class codes of values and behaviors save him in the end. Once in Brownlow's home, Oliver experiences a purifying illness that allows him to experience proper development. The illness essentially wipes away all of the bad experiences and corruption Oliver witnessed. After, he soaks in that which he internally has always known: the value of the Victorian domestic influence, the first stage of development for Victorian boys, according to Tosh. Like Rose, who could only come to a full knowledge of her authentic self through illness, Oliver, once he recovers, comes to recognize his true path and the work he needs to do. Because of Oliver's tragic circumstances, he has missed the stages of proper masculine development in his life thus far and must be rushed through them, hence his immediate reduction to a helpless, infantile state at the Brownlow's. He must be totally dependent upon his mother figure, Mrs. Bedwin, and he absorbs the experience of being in her care, in essence completing one stage of his development. Later, of course, Oliver will spend much time with Mrs. Bedwin and Rose Maylie, in whose company he will become "completely domesticated" (255).

Dickens also does not permit Oliver to remain in the infantile state for long and allows him a mock breeching. Elevating Oliver from infant to young man, Dickens explains: "[Oliver] was no sooner strong enough to put his clothes on, properly, than Mr. Brownlow caused a complete new suit, and a new cap, and a new pair of shoes, to be provided for him" (102). Passing from babyhood into boyhood, his outward appearance now matches his inward birthright. Oliver's development continues to move in the correct direction when he indicates a

desire to learn (possibly to attend school) and wishes to read Brownlow's books. Asked if he would "like to grow up a clever man, and write books," Oliver "considered a little while; and at last said, he should think it would be a much better thing to be a book-seller; upon which the old gentleman laughed heartily and declared he had said a very good thing" (103). The exchange is fascinating in its portrayal of Oliver's quick adaptation to his new status as a middle-class citizen. He recognizes that he must learn and prove himself able to learn; yet he passes the crucial test in that he recognizes that the ultimate goal is to enter the game of middle-class commerce as a businessman.

What makes *Oliver Twist* such an interesting novel is its mixture of emphasis on both commerce and morality as essential elements necessary for one to successfully mark oneself as middle class. Oliver's trials up until this point have been typical of the eighteenth-century orphan story: he has faced adventure and hardship, bodily danger and emotional despair due to solitude. Oliver does not necessarily struggle with becoming authentic or maintaining that state, but the choice of immoral or inauthentic behavior, of adopting disguise to get what one desires, is available to him at nearly every turn. Making good choices, even in the face of danger, seems to become his ultimate challenge, mainly because each test revolves around Oliver entering legitimate, authentic business practices or the corrupt commerce system of Fagin's gang. Oliver, aligned purposely with Brownlow in ways not related to blood, is slated for survival all along because he recognizes authenticity and commerce as being blended with an emerging Victorian emphasis on morality. The orphan is a success. Dickens however recognizes the flaws in his optimism. Acknowledging that not all members of the middle class carry such a moral, authentic origin forces him to focus on middle-class failures in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In this novel,

Dickens essentially revises *Oliver Twist*, allowing characters to experience both destruction and success, presenting to the middle class a stark impression of the risks to its long-term survival.

The Old Curiosity Shop

Morality, virtue, and, crucially, authenticity emerge as the most important qualities a member of the Victorian middle class can possess—qualities that ensure survival as long as all of the correct elements of middle-class Victorian morality are in place. A man's acquisition of morality and authenticity are enough to ensure survival and success in *Oliver Twist*, but Dickens's naïve ideals disintegrate in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, a story that proposes a real threat that the orphan/middle class will not survive into the future. Though many view this novel as another failed narrative (or, at the very least, an overly sentimental story⁸), what actually appears on the page is a well-thought out evolution of Dickens's use of the orphan as metonym for the middle class. Many orphans appear in *Oliver Twist*, but *The Old Curiosity Shop* practically is littered with them. By heightening the reality and consequences of orphanhood so dramatically, Dickens tries to strengthen his earlier argument in a drastic way. Survival of these orphans is always the issue most at stake, and each character participates as an example of various types of Victorian middle-class citizens, representing different levels or risks to the survival of the middle class. In this version of society, Dickens focuses the reader's attention on all of the orphaned characters in the book while keeping firmly in the back of the reader's mind that the inherent

⁸ Though Oscar Wilde's famous quote about laughing while reading about the death of Nell reflects the reaction of many who encounter *The Old Curiosity Shop*, modern readers of the novel should not discount the mid-nineteenth-century reader's emotional involvement with the story. The death of a pure child like Nell struck a chord with contemporary readers, "for hardly a family was untouched by child death or by infant mortality." Her character "became an icon for a culture," because she represented so many of its struggles and emotions (McParland 19).

threat is that the world depicted in the novel (a microcosm of the Victorian middle class) could collapse.

Dickens continues to concentrate on the redeeming qualities of middle-class morality—in the business world and in the home. He once again shows that morality, and, therefore, authenticity, must be in place for the Victorians to survive. In this revision, however, he emphasizes the crucial need for female authenticity as well, morphing Oliver's story into a female orphan tale revised to discuss the important role women and the home must play in the future of middle-class survival.

More than any other novel he had written up until this point, the plot of *The Old Curiosity Shop* hinges on survival, and who survives and who does not is of the utmost importance. Nell, of course, dies; and, as the most prominent orphan in the novel, she receives an understandable amount of critical attention. Still, her character, like Oliver's, can only be understood by first looking at the other orphans in the novel. Nell is the compass around which the other orphaned characters swirl, but her fate is not the only important issue. Instead, the message she conveys about middle-class survival is set up and eventually doubled within the narratives of other orphans in the story.

A. Secondary Orphans as Doubles in *The Old Curiosity Shop*

Though Rose Maylie provides a sort of undeveloped double for Oliver, the secondary orphan characters in *The Old Curiosity Shop* amplify Nell's character and fate in startling ways. The most stable and strongest double for Nell is the ideal Christopher Nubbles, affectionately known as Kit. Like Oliver, Kit is an orphan of superior moral composition, and it comes as no surprise that Dickens makes him Nell's closest friend. He turns out to be the most successful

image of authentic masculinity in the novel, and, by modeling him closely upon Oliver Twist, Dickens sets up a predetermined expectation of Kit's future success. As with his portrayal of Oliver, Dickens examines the most somber moments in Kit's life and the child's natural disposition towards seriousness and authenticity. The two qualities are closely linked in both novels, and Dickens uses words such as "earnest[ness]" or "gravity" to indicate moral characters within the novel—especially when describing males.

Unlike Oliver, however, Kit is not a member of the middle class, but he is an orphan who embodies all of the proper middle-class masculine virtues from an early age, a sign that perhaps he could move up in the world. Even though he remains in the working class throughout the story, he enacts the role of a grown middle-class male from the beginning, taking care of his family, being kind to his mother and siblings (who appear most frequently in a poor but clean and cozy domestic setting), and dedicating himself to behaving authentically.⁹ Kit prematurely experiences most of Tosh's stages that lead to proper masculinity, with school years being replaced by real world experience, but Kit is a better-developed, smarter version of Oliver Twist.

Dickens seems unconcerned with Kit's future success and survival because the child never questions his firm moral foundation. Like Oliver, he is accused of a crime he did not commit. Like Oliver, he is frightened, but his response is much more mature than Oliver's primitive reaction. Kit's fear centers on people perceiving him as something false, making him

⁹ Kit, though he is of a lower class, represents the core values of Dickens's middle-class orphan. Sarah Winter, in her article "Dickens's Curious Didacticism," proposes, "*The Old Curiosity Shop* offers its own version of a celebration of the piety of the poor.... In commenting on Kit's family life, the narrator characterizes the 'household affections' of the 'poor man' as more authentic than the aristocrat's ties to familiar lands because they are based not on feelings of ownership but on affective ties" (37). This distinction is important in Dickens's work overall, for he hopes to distinguish between the immoral lives of the upper classes and the perfected authentic lives of the middle class. Kit certainly has the moral and authentic qualifications to become a middle-class citizen, and perhaps Dickens uses his character to allow readers to see those of the lower classes (at least those behaving in certain ways) as future members of the middling classes.

feel “almost beside himself with grief” (455). When his mother visits him at the prison and tells him that she never doubted his innocence, Kit is strengthened, saying, ““I can bear it [wrongful imprisonment] mother. Come what may, I shall always have one drop of happiness in my heart when I think that you said that”” (459).

Kit’s adult future is secure at the end of the novel, even though he is not a member of the middle class. He may be working class, but his orphanhood and self-cultivation of authenticity and a strong work ethic make him symbolic of the ideal Victorian middle-class male, pointing to the potential of upward class mobility. His positive outcome is important to recognize, for he symbolically portrays the sense of illegitimacy felt by the middle class during this time. Because Dickens allows the boy to succeed and even procreate (by the end of the novel he has at least four children), the reader sees that proper influences, like those Kit absorbed from Nell, can allow for class identity, mobility, and security. By enacting Nell’s values, Kit becomes a type of middle-class figure who, though still not completely prosperous yet, definitely has moved up in the world by the end of the novel and has a secure future.

To make his point clear that such models of authenticity can be successful, Dickens must double Kit’s character with a less optimistic revision of Oliver Twist. Richard (Dick) Swiveller complicates Dickens’s ideas about middle-class survival as an altered version of Kit and Oliver, because he is an orphan born into the middle class who is lazy and without a work ethic.¹⁰ Worse, and unlike Oliver and Kit, he is dependent upon others for survival, even though he is a

¹⁰ Interestingly, Richard Swiveller’s character also has been doubled with Nell’s. In “The Dynamics of Time in *The Old Curiosity Shop*,” Philip Rogers argues, “Dick’s development follows essentially the same pattern as that of the characters associated with Nell. . . . [And, also] like Nell, Dick is compelled, in his own way, to stand on the edge of the sexton’s well and look down.” He also experiences “his almost fatal illness” and “is obliged to repeat Nell’s weary pilgrimage” while he is sick (141). Though I am most interested in Swiveller’s comparisons with Kit and Oliver, his role as a potential double for Nell strengthens my argument about Dickens’s overall use of orphans in his novels.

grown man. These details are important because through this early vision of Dick's character, Dickens emphasizes the precarious position each member of the middle class finds himself in. Dick may have been born to the middle class but his parents never taught him survival or set up proper guardians to ensure his survival. Blood inheritance, in other words, will not secure future success—or survival—in a Victorian orphan story.

Dick does survive the narrative, becoming, in fact, a very colorful and important character capable of successful change. In the beginning, however, Dick's lethargy and willingness to go along with any plan that will advance him at the moment is a foil to Kit's decisive, authentic action. Dickens explains Dick's bad character, describing him as a vile version of an eighteenth-century orphan who dwells in a world of corrupt sincerity, saying that for Dick "vanity, interest, poverty, and every spendthrift consideration" are the only things that move him to action.

That Dick does turn out well, and how Dickens accomplishes this, is an amplification of his early ideas about the important role of the domestic in *Oliver Twist*. Dick's catalyst for change occurs due to his contact with the kind Marchioness. Like Oliver and Rose, Dick endures illness that forces him into an infantile state, allowing him to experience contact with the feminine domestic realm. It is, as with Oliver, a cleansing necessary to transform him into the ideal version of masculinity. He awakens to discover that the Marchioness has been tending him, and he suddenly wants her close to him and to "look [at her] very earnestly" (481). Though one could read these moments as expressions of gratitude for the Marchioness's sacrifices during his illness, these new desires and expressions are of "earnest[ness]," a quality previously lacking in Dick. It is his encounter with the motherly, domestic behavior of the Marchioness that allows Dick to begin his journey to proper masculinity (just as Oliver Twist had to experience during his

illness). That the Marchioness is capable of this ability in spite of her upbringing (or lack thereof as a product of the monstrous Sally and the deformed Quilp) indicates that morality and proper behavior is a choice.

Similar to Oliver, after his illness Dick jumps into a speed course in how to become a gentleman. He, too, must learn all of the things an authentic male like Kit already knows—including how to recognize gentlemen. Shortly after he awakens, Dickens begins to refer to him as Richard or Mr. Swiveller, rather than Dick—signs that Dick has undergone successful transformation from the inauthentic to the respected. Additionally, gentlemen rather than con artists now surround him. After resting for a short while after his initial awakening, “Richard Swiveller became conscious, by slow degrees” that “four gentlemen directly approached his bedside” (490). Richard’s appetite returns, and he acts in “perfect seriousness of intention, and the utmost gravity” as he would give attention to the Marchioness at the same time as he ate (491). Richard’s increasing association with “earnest[ness],” “gravity,” and looking people in the eye all indicate the change he has gone through and his new positive alignment with Kit.

But the male orphans in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, as much as they direct specific messages about cultivating male authenticity, also speak volumes about the role of females and feminine authenticity. Neither Kit nor Dick (or Oliver, for that matter) can succeed fully without a positive encounter with the pure domestic angel. Women in this later novel play the most important role, and the fact that nearly every woman mentioned is an orphan is no small detail. The Marchioness, though imperfect like Dick and not allowed to conceive a child even though she has overcome the circumstances she was born into, is the most positive outcome readers encounter, for in the masculine world of this novel Dickens places the most anxiety and pressure upon those female orphans who have failed in their obligation to become domestic angels. This,

in consequence, emphasizes the possible demise of the entire middle class should all females not enact authenticity and become angelic keepers of the domestic space.

By focusing so much attention upon the innocent female-orphaned child Nell, however, Dickens opens a discussion about gender that provokes questions about the Victorian perception of the feminine domestic sphere and the masculine public world of business. Dickens perverts these spaces into grotesque deformities of their ideal (and deformity, of course, is heavily emphasized in the novel) to show what must be made perfect within the middle class in order to ensure survival. Domestic life and business life must be kept separate to cultivate morality and authenticity correctly—and women are crucial in this central aspect of proper middle-class development.

The most glaring example of the perversion of the middle-class separation of spheres occurs within the character of Sally Brass, who will become Nell's most frightening double. She represents the ultimate degradation of femininity and the domestic, and she foreshadows a frightening potential outcome for Nell. Sally makes no attempt to separate the spheres—and the outcome, for Dickens, is horrifying. Sally consistently crosses gender and sexual lines in the novel, and, worst of all, creates a domestic space based on business rather than feminine domesticity.

Though commonplace in centuries past, Tosh explains that by the mid-nineteenth century, running a business out of a home, or combining the domestic space with the business space (i.e. the feminine with the masculine), had fallen out of fashion in middle-class circles to the point that it was seen as an affront. Tosh goes on to explain that by the mid-nineteenth century, “only at home could a man be truly and authentically himself” (33). This statement is fascinating because it implies that the purity of the domestic and the authenticity of the man were

codependent on each representing itself within a state of authenticity that was highly gendered. In other words, each gender depended upon the proper enactment of authenticity by the other.

Therefore, Sally is the ultimate perversion of what Nell could become should she remain under the influence and guidance of her grandfather. Sally continually negates her femininity, often equating herself with her brother and the masculine¹¹, saying, “I ought to have been the brother, and you the sister” (483) or “My brother and I are just the same” (494). She also uses the home as only a masculine sphere of business—as a single client brothel in her youth (using her sexuality as business during her most fertile years¹²) and as a law office in her later years (after her sexuality no longer brings her business, or, perhaps, the ability to procreate).

Even though a female, Sally performs as yet another revision of *Oliver Twist* in some ways. She represents the life of dishonest commerce and crime that Oliver could choose at any moment. But her purpose in this novel is much more significant. Sally is a woman capable of reproduction. That Dickens allowed her to reproduce with Quilp—who is also a sexual threat to Nell—functions as a warning to the middle class: biological survival may be possible among such degraded people, but the outcome is invalid and will not sustain life in the long run (hence the reason Quilp’s legal wife and the Marchioness are not allowed to reproduce).

Ultimately, Sally’s fate somewhat eases the reader’s pain of experiencing Nell’s demise, for Sally becomes an image of a devolved human—or worse, a devolved woman. Surprisingly,

¹¹ For a fascinating examination of Sally Brass as a rare example of a woman in the legal profession see “Defiled and De-Sexed: Dickens’s Portrayal of a Woman Waging Law in Victorian England” (2007). In this article, Sara Deutch Schotland argues that Sally Brass “is the antithesis of femininity...not simply set apart from the rest of her gender, but unnatural” (441). Though Schotland’s argument validates Sally Brass’s character as an early example of a female in a traditionally male workplace, her attention to Sally’s violation of feminine behavior is especially interesting.

¹² As textual notes from the Penguin edition indicate, the faded furnishings of the Brass home indicate that Sally was running a brothel there at some point during the past.

Dickens allows this pseudo-orphan figure (who also orphaned, purposely, her own child) to survive. Of her future, the narrator states:

Of Sally Brass, conflicting rumours went abroad. Some said with confidence that she had gone down to the docks in male attire, and had become a female sailor; others darkly whispered that she had enlisted as a private in the second regiment of Foot Guards, and had been seen in uniform, and on duty, to wit, leaning on her musket and looking out of a sentry-box in St James's Park, one evening. ...but the truth appears to be that, after the lapse of some five years (during which there is no direct evidence of her having been seen at all), two wretched people were more than once observed to crawl at dusk from the inmost recesses of St Giles's, and to take their way along the streets, with shuffling steps and cowering shivering forms, looking into the roads and kennels as they went in search of refuse food or disregarded offal. These forms were never beheld but in those nights of cold and gloom, when the terrible spectres, who lie at all other times in the obscene hiding-places of London, in archways, dark vaults and cellars, venture to creep into the streets; the embodied spirits of Disease, and Vice, and Famine. It was whispered by those who should have known, that these were Sampson and his sister Sally; and to this day, it is said, they sometimes pass, on bad nights, in the same loathsome guise, close at the elbow of the shrinking passenger. (549-550)

The fate of Sally and her brother (though the emphasis is on Sally) becomes a terrifying ending to a fairy tale—a genre that always depends on imparting a life lesson to the reader. But this moral takes on the essence of dangerous perversion that abounds in the streets of London—dangerous because of the risk of infection. The “rumours” of Sally becoming a cross-dressing sailor, surrounded by people who were known for loose sexual morals and venereal disease, or, even worse, becoming “a private in the second regiment of Foot Guards” and being within close physical space proximity to the royal family, so pure in its public image, presents enough of a terrifying outcome. Her willingness to mingle with those “rumoured” to have disease and her proximity to the image of the pure, domestic family (not to mention the nation), increase the fear of infection. To describe her as a “spectre” is not only an image meant to frighten but also an image of fluidity. The ghost can float and go where it wants, seeping through walls of even the most sacred of spaces for eternity, an image that indicates that the literal and metaphorical

disease Sally represents to the middle-class readers of *The Old Curiosity Shop* is something that could destroy immediately or over time. It is quite proper for Dickens to end by calling Sally and her brother “the embodied spirits of Disease, and Vice, and Famine”—not disembodied like a ghost, but “embodied” and physically present to pose a real risk to the community.

B. Little Nell: Oliver Twist Destroyed

Of course, little Nell is the orphan with whom readers are most concerned. She is indeed a revision of Oliver Twist in several obvious ways. She, like Oliver, is an “avatar of childish goodness,” innocent, pure, and moral to the end. In her early life, she consciously displays morality in every decision she makes and, like Kit, she is another ideal by whom readers must judge other characters. Nell also mirrors Kit in that she never truly struggles with identifying authentic people, and she chooses the path of morality when in danger. She is an advanced Oliver, but her character does depart from Oliver’s in significant ways—especially because she is female. Nell’s life experience, like many of the other orphans in the novel, has been jaded by realities that should not be part of her world. The feminine purity she supposedly represents is not entirely whole, even from the beginning, and this is due in large part to the faults of her home life and the lack of care given to her protection and development.

Though some scholars insist that Dickens intended for readers to view her in complete childlike innocence, the fact remains that, logically, Nell is of age at “nearly fourteen” to engage in sexual activity that could produce a child (63). Her “quick eye” and her often-cited reluctance to be in the company of Quilp are all signs that Nell realizes her childhood is coming to an end (12). The novel is the story about a child on the brink of young adulthood, a person whose choices no longer have childish consequences—just like the middle class in 1840. Whatever

decisions Nell makes from this point forward will decide her domestic and sexual future.

Actually, however, all of this has been predetermined. As the novel progresses, readers see that Nell has been doomed from the start. Through her life, readers encounter what happens to a society when the domestic, the very backbone of Victorian masculinity, falls apart.

Nell actually exists in an environment perilously close to Sally Brass's type of home life in a business space, a construction that more firmly aligns her with degenerate sexuality. Yet even the faux home of the shop Nell and her grandfather inhabit seems a pleasing alternative compared to what they eventually experience. Nell's journey throughout the countryside of England is more than just an escape from Quilp (and, therefore, sexually threatening situations); instead, it is a search for a suitable, secure home. Unlike *Oliver Twist*, who also searched for a home, living in the most undesirable locations and coming out of it unscathed, Nell, because she is female and the vessel for the domestic, must not be contaminated. She should be the center of the domestic space, but her experiences, and the resulting consequence of being separated from the domestic, slowly deteriorate and weaken her to the point of no return.

Dickens actually divorces Nell from her childhood the moment she and her grandfather leave their home/shop, placing her in the awkward position of enacting the adult, head-of-household role. Every potential home that they find is corrupt, just as their situation is corrupt, for the role reversal between the true adult male and the female child is unthinkable. They move from towns reeking of "sickening smells" to communities of degenerate "vagabond groups" (154). As they travel, the grandfather's state of mind deteriorates, and Nell feels the need to escape from the corruption she witnesses and find a true home. The pair come across a seemingly suitable helper, a kindly schoolmaster, who invites the two into his home, and within this space Nell once again begins to thrive, taking up her familiar position in the domestic, "by

busying herself in the performance of...household duties” (192). Though all seems ideal in this situation, it is nothing more than a calming respite from the toil of their journey. Nell realizes that they cannot remain with the schoolmaster because the home is not legitimately theirs (knowledge that relates to both property law and finances, two pursuits young ladies rarely engaged in).

Forced to move on, Nell and her grandfather inhabit other temporary homes that represent a gradual state of degradation and separation from the true Victorian domestic space. They reside for a time in a cozy and clean abode of a “Christian lady,” however the home is a “little house upon wheels,” an image of instability and itinerancy (201). Gradually, their homes become more and more unsuitable until finally they encounter the worst “noisy town” of all. By this point in the narrative, Nell’s body and mind have suffered so much and been separated from the home for so long that she naturally falls ill. She loses all connection with the domestic and, for the first time in the novel, Nell and her grandfather are reduced to small unidentifiable and inhuman forms: “an atom...in a mountain heap of misery” (332). The town, referred to as an undefined “heap” of industrial structures, offers little hope for shelter until a strange man comes along.

Dickens allows this unnamed character, a “form of a man,” to save Nell. Strangely, Dickens does take the time to specify him as an orphan, even though he removes all other identifying features from the man’s description. Nell notices that he stares in hopeless, dejected misery into a “flame as it shone through the iron chinks, and [watched] the white ashes as they fell into their bright hot grave below”—a moment soon to be repeated by Nell in a different way (335). The man calls the fire his “friend,” and in a primitive gesture aligns himself with it, saying, “It has been alive as long as I have...It’s my memory, that fire, and shows me all my

life” (337). He explains that his past, present, and future are recorded in the fire in a way that even Nell cannot experience.

Readers forget about this man—acceptable in some respects because his class is not the one at risk. However, readers should not dismiss him or the message he represents. As a member of the lower classes that have existed for all of England’s history, the man has a certain amount of stability. In Dickens’s eyes, he threatens no one and will endure because he will never face the challenges of surviving the class system that characters like Oliver and Nell must.

Of course, Nell must remove herself and her grandfather from this environment as quickly as possible, though she realizes that she is on a path that is “a dismal blighted way” (338). By using the word “blighted,” Dickens creates a necessary connection between Nell and her predecessor, Rose Maylie, in *Oliver Twist*. Both women are described as “blighted,” a term taken from the word blight, which is defined as “any baleful influence of atmospheric or invisible origin, that suddenly blasts, nips, or destroys plants, affects them with disease, arrests their growth, or prevents their blossom from ‘setting’; [and] a diseased state of plants of unknown or assumed atmospheric origin” (*OED*). No other term could be more appropriate in foreshadowing Nell’s outcome. As a child growing into adulthood, she has been afflicted with “disease,” her “growth” has been “arrest[ed],” and, symbolically, her “blossoms” will be “prevent[ed]...from ‘setting.’” And all of this, in the same way, comes from infection of an “atmospheric origin.” The same implication is derived from the same source’s definition of the word as a verb: “to destroy the brightness, beauty, or promise of” (*OED*). Rose Maylie was also described as “blight[ed],” but she would end up happily grown and married, unlike Nell, who is resigned to her hopeless state.

Nell and her grandfather depart the factory town only to come upon a landscape defiled by “coal-dust and factory smoke [that] darkened the shrinking leaves, and coarse rank flowers, and where the struggling vegetation sickened and sank under the hot breath of kiln and furnace, making them by its presence seem yet more blighting and unwholesome than in the town itself” (340). All of nature is shriveling up and dying; and once again Dickens associates the area in the same language as he used to describe Nell earlier: “blight[ed].” Only here, it is a present condition, “blighting,” and Nell is passing through it, witnessing “[d]ismantled houses...tottering to the earth, propped up by fragments of others that had fallen down, unroofed, windowless, blackened, desolate, but yet inhabited. Men, women, and children, wan in their looks and ragged in attire...[and] brick towers, never ceasing in their black vomit, blasting all things living or inanimate, shutting out the face of day, and closing in on all these horrors with a dense dark cloud” (340-341). An apocalyptic vision indeed, but one that emphasizes decay and destruction¹³ (words used over and over in *The Old Curiosity Shop*) and the demise of the most sacred of all middle-class spaces—the home. The worst aspect of the scene is that it is almost tubercular in its diseased state, with the factories eating alive all of humanity and life from the inside out.

Witnessing this most horrible of environments, Nell becomes seriously ill and completely loses her survival instincts. In a seemingly hopeful twist of fate, the schoolmaster once again appears to save the pair, only this time when he encounters Nell he cannot identify her. She is an “unconscious burden” and an “it” (347). Because she has been reduced to such an unidentifiable

¹³ As Rachel Bennett, in “Punch versus Christian in *The Old Curiosity Shop*,” claims, “The sense of loss [in *The Old Curiosity Shop*] is associated with a perception of decay in all things. [The novel] begins and ends with images of decay. Decay is expressed in the material world by ruin, in nature by the change from summer to winter, among men by the contrast between youth and age and by the passing of the generations.... Throughout the novel one feels a struggle in Dickens between accepting the evidence of the inexorable progress of all things towards death and an attempt to disrupt that progress by introducing elements of disorder” (427).

mass, Nell will not be able to recover and be a figure of middle-class survival. Her illness contains nothing that will function as purification or that will give her purpose as it did with Oliver, Rose, or Dick. Nell, as an “it,” has lost all that could possibly salvage her as a proper vessel of Victorian feminine authenticity.

Though she appears to rally, the optimism revolving around her faux recovery is misleading. Even Nell realizes that there has not been a recovery at all. The narrator explains that Nell notices the “strange shadows [that] came and went with every flickering of the fire—the solemn presence, within, of that decay which falls on senseless things the most enduring in their nature” (393). The resurrection of the fire image, of “decay” and death surrounding her, reminds the reader of her encounter shortly before in the industrial town and indicates that Nell still bears the moral contamination—if not the physical—of her experiences there. Her recognition of this fact is made abundantly clear when she privately confronts her future as a mature (i.e. sexual) woman in an experience at the old well in the church.

Nell’s confrontation with adulthood at the well is preceded by her acknowledging that “she grew stronger every day, and would be a woman, soon”—a sentiment that is not spoken clearly, but “muttered” (412). Nell, in her diminished state, cannot be allowed to progress to womanhood, for someone as tainted as she is cannot produce proper middle-class offspring. Her fight against the progression from childhood into adulthood is resolved when she walks with the old man to the well in the crypt of the church. The old man, too feeble to engage in sexual activity himself and apparently a figure of celibacy, is an appropriate companion in this moment. He takes her to the well—as Nell calls it, “A black and dreadful place!”—and tells her to look in. He cautions Nell, telling her that he will hold her hand but will not look in himself: “I am too old—I mean too rheumatic—to stoop, myself,” he claims. He tells her that he has “often had the

fancy...that it might have been dug at first to make the old place more gloomy, and the old monks more religious” (418). The comment seems benign, but when taken with other observations by Nell in the crypt—imaginings of “hooded figures [who] knelt and prayed around, and told their rosaries of beads...[and] small galleries, where the nuns had been wont to glide along—dimly seen in their dark dresses so far off” (405)—a place described as a location to make “the old monks more religious” implies that the well is a place that encourages one to deny one’s sexuality and desires. The experience effectively does the same for Nell, and she resolves herself to die before she reaches sexual maturity.

Nell’s death is the only thing that can restore her to the purest, most uncorrupted version of herself. When she died, gone “were the traces of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues...All gone. Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose. And still her former self lay there, unaltered in this change” (540). It takes death to shed away the layers of acquired experience to allow Nell to achieve stunted innocence and growth—“her former self.” Nell must be sacrificed because, even though she is moral and authentic as a female, she is also corrupted beyond redemption. Absent from the home too long, this version of the orphan/middle class cannot survive.

As in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens implies in *The Old Curiosity Shop* that there is innate goodness within these orphan children. Though Oliver’s goodness is directly related to both genetics and morality (resulting from his creation by two middle-class parents), Nell’s future depends solely on middle-class morality and maintenance of feminine authenticity in the home. Genetics play no part in this tale; survival or demise, successful development or devolution, depends upon encounters with and reactions to the middle-class world.

Dickens is responsible for transforming the eighteenth-century orphan story into a contemporary commentary on Victorian middle-class society. His orphans are tightly woven into a system of survival or demise that validates nineteenth-century emphasis on authenticity and morality. Dickens, from *Oliver Twist* to his last published novel, continued to manipulate this archetype, shaping the orphan's story in a way that allowed him to continue to address contemporary concerns. But other authors during the nineteenth century would continue to use the orphan as a symbolic messenger, signifying Dickens's legacy.

GYPSY INFLUENCES: THE WANDERING WOMEN OF
WUTHERING HEIGHTS AND *THE MILL ON THE FLOSS*

Wandering, orphaned children populate the Dickensian canon, and as explained in the previous chapter, Nell's journeys lead to her physical breakdown, creating an insurmountable disconnect between herself and the home. Though Nell is already an orphan in fact, another type of orphanhood—one that is symbolic—distinguishes her as a character when she severs herself from the domestic. When Nell is separated from her place within the home, she becomes orphaned from everything that connects her to the ideal of Victorian middle-class womanhood.

Nell's experiences with itinerancy, however, differ from her predecessor, Oliver's. In some respects, his homelessness and travels across English landscapes and cityscapes contribute to his educational experience as a middle-class male. Unlike Nell, it is expected of him to leave a domestic environment at some point in his boyhood. As John Tosh explains, there is a necessary break from the home that must occur for the male child, for it helps him to develop masculinity. Away from the safety of a secure home environment, he learns survival and business skills, permitting him to prove his worth in the public world before returning to claim the domestic once more as his own. Oliver, of course, has his path skewed slightly, but his positive, healing contact with the domestic ensures his eventual ability to return to it as a successful adult.

But for female characters forced into plots of orphanhood and itinerancy, the narrative necessarily changes. Survival, never really a threat in Oliver's happy tale, becomes less viable for girls denied connection with the domestic. Indeed, for female children, separation is not an option, for the domestic *is* what forms their identity. When an author allows a female fictional

child to wander from home, the resolution of the plot is usually quite dismal. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, orphanhood placed Nell in a jeopardized position, but her forced wandering necessitated her ultimate demise.

It is precisely this gendered injustice that Victorian female authors recognized in their own readings of *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Seeking to find a way for Nell to survive through adulthood, women writers sought to revise her character by further illuminating the consequences of orphanhood and itinerancy on the female protagonist. To prove their points, these authors chose to predispose their wandering female characters with a deliberate connection to Gypsiness. The emergence of Gypsiness as a trope in fiction by women writers comes to represent itinerancy as aberrant behavior that combines with dangerous sexual expression. In these stories, the women embrace their difference and act upon it—rather than trying to change it—and this aspect of their character emerges in their status as orphans. By making nonconforming Victorian female characters into a combination of Gypsies and orphans, the women authors end up isolating these characters through difference in order to symbolically portray a middle-class struggle for survival—just like Dickens. The female itinerant orphan, however, always contends with her role as it is formed by her sexuality. If females stray from the home and adopt itinerancy and sexual freedom as a preferred way of life over domesticity, the community has no other choice than to shun them, effectively orphaning the female character into a life of degrading independence.

The figure of the Gypsy orphan in literature by female authors like Emily Brontë and George Eliot allows these writers, in a uniquely gendered way, to express opinions about middle-class values and fears of survival. Manipulating versions of both *Oliver Twist* and little Nell in their books, Brontë and Eliot bring special attention to the archetype of Nell, in particular. They

seek to revise Dickens's early narratives of orphanhood, and, to a degree, they succeed, fastening upon the figure of the Gypsy and expanding the scope of the Little Nell narrative generationally to more fully consider its repercussions. At the same time, both remain committed to a Victorian middle-class ethos. In order to uphold this ethos, they sacrifice the radicalness of their revised Little Nell narrative, and both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mill on the Floss* serve as self-conscious experiments with the under-developed implications of the orphan narrative that ultimately confirm the fundamental incompatibility of middle-class survival and orphanhood, especially when the latter is combined with itinerancy and the racial taint of Gypsiness. As Brontë and Eliot found, however, the result of allowing female characters tainted with a combination of orphanhood and Gypsiness to survive beyond adolescence only verifies that Dickens's little Nell plot is impossible to overcome in the nineteenth-century—at least for women. The female middle-class orphan who contains elements of Gypsiness cannot be allowed to live because she poses a threat to the survival of her family and society in general—and she can even force the Oliver Twists of the world to fall along with her.

In the end, both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mill on the Floss* allow orphanhood and Gypsiness to collide in a way that backs up Dickens's earlier ideas about wandering orphans. These female authors reveal not only that women who violate middle-class norms by symbolically becoming infected with Gypsiness will be punished, but also that middle-class survival depends upon such characters being destroyed. These women writers contest that Dickens's revising Oliver Twist's character into little Nell because anytime the gender changes from male to female, then, consequently, the outcome also changes.

The Gypsy in British Literature

Victorians were fascinated by Gypsies, who numbered at least 10,000 in the early years of Victoria's reign (Kenrick 75), peopling not only the countryside and the cities, but also productions of popular culture. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, for example, Gypsies appear briefly in the story as dirty characters associated with trickery and animality, whose habits are entirely foreign to the middle-class reader and Nell herself—in spite of the fact that these Gypsies live in England.¹ Dickens, early in the novel, illustrates the scene of Nell's encounter with a busy Gypsy camp, stating:

Black-eyed gipsy girls, hooded in showy handkerchiefs, sallied forth to tell fortunes, and pale slender women with consumptive faces lingered upon the footsteps of ventriloquists and conjurors, and counted the sixpences with anxious eyes long before they were gained. As many of the children as could be kept within bounds, were stowed away, with all the other signs of dirt and poverty, among the donkeys, carts, and horses; and as many as could not be thus disposed of ran in and out in all intricate spots, crept between people's legs and carriage wheels, and came forth unharmed from under horses' hoofs. The dancing-dogs, the stilts, the little lady and the tall man, and all the other attractions, with organs out of number and bands innumerable, emerged from the holes and corners in which they had passed the night, and flourished boldly in the sun. (157)

Dickens's description creates a sense of threat that depends upon a long-standing cultural view of Gypsiness. For centuries, authors often limited descriptions of Gypsies to caricatures of devious criminals or practitioners of the dark arts. The stereotypical dark, mysterious women and men capable of amusing (yet, potentially dangerous) sleight of hand; the “ventriloquists and conjurors,” “donkeys, carts, and horses,”—and, of course, the “dancing dogs,”—in Dickens's passage, all create a sense of danger, chaos, and otherness enmeshed within literary tradition. The carnivalesque atmosphere he creates invites readers to engage in an exciting moment that can easily be seen and heard in the mind—exactly the imaginative experience readers anticipate.

¹ For an in-depth exploration of nineteenth-century British attitudes towards Gypsies, see David Mayall's *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

But Dickens, always adept at manipulating his language to reveal his opinions about people and places, also presents disturbing images that can be read as distinctly colored by Victorian concerns about the Gypsy population. Their women are seductive and “hooded”—but also diseased. The children among this band of nomads are also strange, as they seem to be uneasily contained, as the adults in the group try to “ke[ep them] within bounds,...[and] stowed away” like the animals around them. Many of them, however, “ran in and out in all intricate spots, cre[eping] between people’s legs and carriage wheels.” The children are fluid creatures, capable of eluding capture or containment, in spite of the fact that they are bearing “signs of dirt and poverty.”

This description reveals more about English Victorian concerns about themselves than it does Gypsies. The lack of control and the inability to contain these people (and especially their children) horrified the nineteenth-century readership, because that which cannot be contained cannot be controlled. Lurking in the background of this description, however, is also the myth that some of these children in Dickens’s Gypsy camp could be stolen English children. Though not expressly stated, Dickens certainly was aware of the popular legends that Gypsies kidnapped English babies to keep as their own. Nothing would be more horrifying to his audience than the thoughts of English children growing up in such degradation and filth, reduced to a base lifestyle.

The itinerant culture, however, soon came to represent (at least in their literature) many desires and concerns of the Victorians, from a longing for freedom outside the confines of expected Victorian behavior to the anxiety about being unable to pinpoint absolute origins of their own class. As Deborah Epstein Nord explains, British writers working with even the most sinister portrayals of Gypsies—that of child snatchers—are essentially reviving an old plot

device in a contemporary way: “Kidnapping stories and Gypsy narratives, as well as the larger tradition of foundling or bastard plots...signal something of the fundamental mystery of individual origins that, even in an age of scientific sophistication, haunts human psyches” (11). This legend surrounds Dickens’s descriptions of Gypsy children and creates an argument about class. Dickens’s middle-class readership confronted the possibility that if their children were not closely watched, they too could fall into such a horrible state. And Nell, because she is set up as both a romanticized figure of a pure, rural wanderer and a contaminating homeless child, combines middle-class fears in a startling way. Obviously, in the end, it is the horror of being a homeless female that dooms her, but the link between Gypsies and orphanhood that Dickens creates in *The Old Curiosity Shop* is important to consider, for it becomes an important trope in later Victorian literature.

In *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930*, Nord explains that the dominant conversation about literary portrayals of Gypsies centered around the idea that they “functioned in British cultural symbolism as a perennial other, a recurrent and apparently necessary marker of difference that, like the biblical Hagar and Ishmael, represented an alternative and rejected lineage” (3). The stories of Hagar and Ishmael also signify exile and a type of forced orphanhood, the narratives wrapped around notions of rightful inheritance and lineage. As Nord emphasizes, questions of “alternative and rejected lineage” lead to obsessions with the Gypsy’s “origin” and a “fantasy of return [to an origin that] informed their sense of self or yearning for redemption” (7). The “literary representation [of Gypsies] was intimately connected to an obsession with origins of all kinds—linguistic, personal, and national. A people ‘without’ origins came to stand, paradoxically, for the question of origins itself and to be used as a trope to signify beginnings, primal ancestry, and the ultimate secret of individual identity” (8). Nord’s ideas

about the Gypsy as both an outsider and as a crucial (though sometimes villainized) link between British history and cultural and national inheritance and identity in a changing Victorian world creates a necessary parallel between her ideas and the trope of orphanhood during the Victorian age as I have explained it. The drama of Gypsy life reeled in the Victorian audience in the same way sensation fiction captured the imagination—and people often wrote about them. In order to understand how Victorians began to manipulate the meaning of Gypsiness in their fiction, however, one must first look at how they were approaching the discussion of real Gypsies in their journalism and nonfiction.

Statistically, a simple examination of the *British Periodicals Database* allows researchers to see the growth in periodical coverage of Gypsies. Between 1830 and 1840, approximately 870 articles were published about Gypsies, indicating that the British people were fascinated by the subculture existing around them. By the decade of 1850 to 1860 the number grew to nearly 1,760, and, between 1860 and 1870, it reached close to 3,200. And, of course, these articles are only the ones included in journals cataloged by the database. The listings do not include newspapers or other smaller publications, which also contain numerous articles about Gypsies (usually related to encampments, thefts, and concerns about cleanliness).

It is my contention that the reasons for this focus on Gypsies in nonfiction periodical coverage culminate in arguments about middle-class survival—but they do so in a very unique way. Concern about Gypsies allowed Victorian writers to explore many aspects of survival, pointing to a culture that, though it appeared vastly different from their own and that they would never relate to, actually seems to spring up out of nowhere without identifiable origins. Additionally, sexual roles and the aspects of daily, let alone generational, survival of Gypsies were extensively covered areas of interest for the Victorians. The articles produced during the

mid-nineteenth century, especially, allow readers to see identifiably Victorian middle-class conversations about identity, gender, morality, religion, authenticity, and origins emerge. These writers spoke less about Gypsies than they did about themselves.

One of the primary points of interest that drew the Victorian to the study of Gypsy history and life is that they want to discover how a people that seems to have no stability or history could survive—and have survived—for so long. Like the middle class, the Gypsy population has no visible origin. Yet they manage to survive and reproduce in successful ways. Gypsy histories, such as Thomas Wright’s “The Early History of the Gypsies in Europe,” published in a May 1850 edition of *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, form the bulk of earlier periodical articles about them. These histories seek to contain the uncontainable and identify a group that seems unidentifiable. The drive to label and contain this large group of people (who, in their diversity, were nonetheless linked by language and certain elements of common culture) mirror the attempts to coalesce the middle class into an identifiable unit.

Wright applies language to the Gypsies that could also be used to describe the middle class. He says, “Perhaps there is no phenomenon in modern history so singular and mysterious as the sudden appearance throughout Europe of that wandering people...who have ever since remained in all the countries in which they settled a people apart from the rest of the population” (459). The middle class’s insistence at seeing themselves as “a people apart from the rest of the population” is crucial to its identity, as stated earlier in this dissertation, just as is the fact that it, too, seemed to “sudden[ly appear]” within England. Wright continues with his study by analyzing evidence of their appearance in various countries, including England as an especial point of interest.

The trend of trying to pin down Gypsy heritage continues throughout the 1850s; however, interest begins to shift slightly during this time. Instead of factual information being the author's priority, cultural analysis of the Gypsies begins to take center stage—especially the analysis of gendered behavior in Gypsies. The focus on gendered behavior appears to be a cloaked discussion of sexual mores during the Victorian era, and female journalists, especially, appear to be drawn towards writing articles about the more intimate and day-to-day lives of Gypsy men and women. For example, in 1853, a Miss A. M. Birkbeck, in her “The Hungarian Gipsies” article printed in *Sharpe's London Magazine of Entertainment and Instruction*, not only tries to pinpoint origins of Hungarian Gypsies but also clearly locates her interest within a cultural examination of the Gypsies.

She first examines children and then men and women, inserting contemporary English concerns into her analysis of a foreign culture. Birkbeck references the current emphasis on reform of impoverished or orphaned English children (who were often removed from their homes and placed in government controlled asylums²) by referring to the efforts of some philanthropists abroad to remove Gypsy children from their corrupt living environment. Such efforts had not been fruitful, she explains, because “[e]ven children, brought up by noblemen, who for years had distinguished themselves at school, were suddenly seized with a longing to be again on the wing, and ran away never to return” (377). The implication is that these children somehow cannot be reformed, because “their old and perverse habits” are part of their inherited and cultural makeup. Even those exposed to Gypsy life for a short time are forever scarred.

² For more information about removal of children to poor houses, see Lydia Murdoch's *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London*.

Birkbeck places a large portion of blame upon the parents of these children. The offspring necessarily fail because they have no stable home; and, without a stable home, the most important aspects of middle-class Victorian culture—morality and authenticity—cannot develop. The Gypsy men, because they lack authenticity, cannot be moral—in business or in the home, precisely because an actual home does not exist. She emphasizes their corrupt nature, highlighting their lack of authenticity both in business and religious devotion—two key elements of Victorian middle-class male life. As to commercial interests, Gypsy men are “uncommonly cunning in business, and can scarcely be surpassed in inventing lies and subterfuges” (379). And concerning their religious lives, the Gypsy man never “trouble[s] his mind with religious scruples; and to the forms of worship he is quite indifferent, becoming Catholic, when dwelling in a Catholic community, with the same unconcern that he turns Protestant or Mahomedan, when induced to do so by fear or profit. To this ready compliance it may be attributed that in Hungary no gipsy has ever suffered persecution on account of his faith” (379). Clearly, these men, portrayed as unable to commit to any value system and operating in a constant state of disguise, are no Oliver Twists.

Still, the Gypsy seems to attain physical endurance and cultural longevity compared to the Englishman—and this is the point of most interest to Birkbeck, as she turns to an emphasis on the body and survival. She explains that the Gypsy has a superhuman ability to survive, a quality that she eventually explains is the result of the Gypsy’s natural sexual prowess. Gypsy sexuality is almost always seen as a repulsive contaminant or as an emblem of sexual freedom—equally problematic in a culture based upon morality and, for women, purity. Gypsy men and women appear as seductive creatures who purposefully, in an almost Gothic but not always sinister way, provoke the imagination to awaken to dangerous notions that would threaten the

middle class. Birkbeck emphasizes this in her article, describing the sleeping habits of the Gypsies, saying: “The social life of this outlawed race bears the impress of great moral depravity. Under a tent, or in a narrow hut, containing one single room, the whole family live, however numerous, without any furniture, even without a bed” (383). That which is explicitly stated in this passage is less important than what is not said, and this passage provokes questions about the most intimate moments of life that must, according to this description, take place in full view of every member of the household.

The heavy emphasis on sexuality provides for both excitement and horror in readers. At this point, Birkbeck strays even further from simply reporting the facts to immersing the reader in an imaginative experience. By bringing in fantasies of aberrant sexual encounters between already oversexed dark men, readers are forced not only to become involved in their own imaginative perception of the event but also to properly recoil from that perception and identify how the Victorian way of living is so much better than the Gypsy’s. In fictional works, authors describing encounters with Gypsies often resort to the same tactics. However, while male characters (usually wealthy or middle class) in literature may escape scarred but relatively unscathed from a Gypsy female, middle-class English female characters are always destroyed by such encounters.³ The infection of the pure English woman with foreign Gypsiness is almost always seen as an abomination—and something that would cause society to shun her from being a recognized member of society. In effect, a woman who succumbs to Gypsy sexuality becomes eternally a Gypsy, orphaned from respectable society forever.

³ Interestingly, Nord argues that one such character, Harry in Walter Scott’s *Guy Mannering*, experiences his “rootedness in place and past [in a way that] constitute[s] the very identity that he has lost. His return from India and exile will restore this identity, and it is Meg Merrilies, the figure [and Gypsy] most associated with his beginnings, who will act as the prime agent of that restoration” (35).

In fact, the symbolic states of Gypsiness and orphanhood often meet in female characters who violate middle-class norms of behavior. Many fictional female protagonists who embrace sexuality and their role as the “dark woman” are often described as Gypsy-like and they are either literally or symbolically orphaned in the story, as in both Brontë’s and Eliot’s novels. Women writers, in particular, were especially interested in survival of this type of protagonist because they, too, embraced a type of aberrance. Women writers in the nineteenth century, by choosing careers and imaginative experiences that took them on journeys beyond the home, were violating prescribed roles for them by middle-class domestic ideology. Like little Nell, their writing places them in a public space where many see them as violators of middle-class norms. As such, women writers become invested in Nell’s story of survival. Were they, like Nell, so corrupted by their paths and choices that they cannot survive? Their search for a positive outcome for Nell was personal, for they willingly fought against the way of life that Nell hopes to embrace.

The dual nature of the female author’s life—traditional versus independent—begins to emerge in their works. Women writers in particular resented such limited views of femininity identified by countless Victorian authors. Instead of being horrified by Birkbeck’s expressions of what she considered to be sexual degradation, some female authors saw the Gypsy lifestyle and freedom of sexual expression as empowering and representative of the freedom that accompanied breaking from Victorian social and gendered behavior codes. And they latch on to the element of Gypsy sexuality and the aspects of orphanhood that accompany the act of embracing sexual freedom. While they acknowledge Dickens’s argument about the effect of Gypsiness on the orphaned little Nell, they do so for different reasons. Female authors rewrite Nell because they must. The reality of being a woman during the Victorian era often meant either

compromise, denial, or self-inflicted isolation. The combination of the tropes of Gypsiness (as a contaminating sexual realization in female characters) and orphanhood (the state of isolation of the sexually independent woman from the rest of Victorian society) is uniquely portrayed by Victorian women writers. Their stories also culminate in a statement about middle-class survival, though even they must conclude that positive outcomes for middle-class families tainted with Gypsy-like middle-class women are not possible.

Wuthering Heights: Gothicizing Little Nell

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*—confusing, brutal, and dismal as it may be—is one of the first attempts by a female author to revise little Nell's story into a narrative of female survival. Though readers become fixated on certain characters, Brontë never removes her attention from the core issue that the homes in *Wuthering Heights* are in a state of disorder and abandonment.⁴ Those who should be most closely associated with the domestic—the women of the story—wander as far from it as possible, while the men in the novel, because their experience with the domestic at various stages in their lives is corrupted, never succeed in the fullest Victorian sense of the word. The failures of families and homes in *Wuthering Heights*, however, always come back to the damage perpetrated by corrupt women. Though nearly every character in the story, a tale (perhaps more than any other) that exhibits what happens when proper parents

⁴ In “The Wuthering of the Other in *Wuthering Heights*,” Steven Vine illuminates the power atmosphere has over the identities of the characters. He specifically points to the disorder found at the Heights, saying, “*Wuthering Heights* is a house under stress; its very stability is the result of a climatic ‘tumult’ that means its windows are sunk, desperately and defensively, deep into its walls, and its clean corners are broken up by obtruding stones. . . . *Wuthering Heights* is skewed by extremity: it is an architectural torsion wuthering between stability and instability” (339-340). It is this “stress” that guides the novel, and only after Brontë instills stability can the story end.

disappear, becomes an orphan, it is the women of the novel who exert the most influence over the outcome of the plot. Brontë takes the figure of *The Old Curiosity Shop*'s little Nell and infuses her with the same qualities that doomed Dickens's female child: orphanhood and Gypsiness. While Nell was forced into her lifestyle, however, Brontë's doomed female characters choose itinerancy willingly, and their choices ignite repercussions that linger into the next generation.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë revises little Nell into two seemingly different versions: Isabella Linton and Catherine Earnshaw. In these revisions, Brontë imagines Nell's future should she have been allowed to survive and reveals that neither outcome is positive. Nell's closest relation in the novel is Isabella Linton. Seemingly pure and good, Isabella's downfall appears to result from her marriage to the Gypsy Heathcliff. As a visual embodiment of Gypsiness, Heathcliff's sexual power over Isabella is strong—but it is not what leads to her eventual demise. Her relationship with Heathcliff actually becomes less significant than her decision willingly to leave behind her established home and lineage to follow him into flight and Gypsy degradation. Isabella's conscious act of wandering from her home makes her slightly different from little Nell, who was forced into her itinerant lifestyle, but the outcome is the same. Though she eventually leaves Heathcliff in a symbolic break with Gypsiness, she must still pay the ultimate price with her life, because she not only has been corrupted fatally by her flight from the home but she also has been mutated through her sexual contact and procreation with the very real Gypsy, Heathcliff. Her child, in turn, also is unfit for survival, as he is the container of inherited corruption—a new perverted revision of *Oliver Twist* without a proper moral inheritance or good genes—and with no middle-class drive to succeed.

Though Isabella's fate is frightening enough for the middle-class Victorian audience, it is within the character of Catherine Earnshaw that Brontë completely reimagines little Nell as a child who appears as an orphaned Gypsy child. Like Nell, Catherine loses parents early in life and is surrounded by an unstable domestic atmosphere. Rather than clinging to what is left of her crumbling home, she appears to adopt Heathcliff's Gypsiness, a choice that dooms her from the beginning of the narrative and corrupts her character and body to the point of mutation into another species. A closer reading of the text, however, reveals that Catherine, rather than Heathcliff, has always been the authentic Gypsy of the story. Her factual orphanhood places her future in jeopardy, as is usual for female Victorian orphans; but, more important is that she, because of her lifelong experience in the corrupted domestic and because of her willing adoption of the Gypsy lifestyle, depicts a horrific version of Nell realized as an adult—and this Nell has the ability to kill. In the end, it is Catherine—not Heathcliff—that is the true Gypsy, and her embodiment of Gypsiness and proud display of independence make her the source of corruption for the entire community.

The ultimate corrupted version of little Nell, embracing orphanhood and Gypsiness rather than running from it, Catherine destroys everything she touches—including her own flesh and blood. Her legitimate brother, Hindley, falls apart each time he reconnects with the Earnshaw home (or with Cathy), and, even though he participates in each of the correct stages of boyhood identified by Tosh, he cannot become a successful man. A failed *Oliver Twist*, Hindley Earnshaw dies in degradation because, unlike Dickens's prototype, he never had the crucial contact with the domestic that was necessary for his development. He is tainted by the corrupt space of his home—but he is especially contaminated by his inability to usurp the female itinerant Cathy's influence over the domestic space.

Catherine's role as the novel's true embodiment of aberrant orphanhood and Gypsiness can only be understood, however, after considering the visible Gypsiness of Heathcliff. Readers are tricked into conforming to their own misplaced ideas about Gypsies and often assign him to the role of villain in the novel, berating his character and participating in his shunning. After viewing his role as an orphan and a Gypsy in light of Catherine's association with those two states, the reader actually comes to see Brontë presenting Heathcliff as a somewhat positive revision of Oliver Twist and little Nell, combined. Though he seemingly has been the catalyst for corruption, he is merely the scapegoat for the horrors depicted in the novel.

As an alternative orphaned Gypsy with which Brontë can experiment, and especially because he is male and capable of manipulating otherness in a way in which Catherine, a legitimate female child of the middle class, cannot, Heathcliff is corrupted more by *his* association with the deteriorated and diminishing Earnshaw family than he is by his potential Gypsy heritage. His features exist more as a marker to label his difference and exoticize his background than they do to blemish him. Instead, it is his association with Cathy that makes him falter as a middle-class male, emphasizing that the real risk, as in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is association with a Gypsy female character whose orphanhood also marks her as corrupted. Once Heathcliff breaks ties with Cathy, he progresses successfully in the world in a properly masculine way. Though he will be tested once more when he reunites with his sister-lover, her death actually allows him to restore the Earnshaw home and name to a stable position. By the end of the novel, observing who survives and thrives is most important, because it indicates clearly Brontë's final declaration about the effects of orphanhood and Gypsiness on survival of both the middle class and women who break middle-class rules.

A. The Women of *Wuthering Heights*: Why Isabella and Catherine Must Die

In some ways, Isabella Linton is the closest relation in Brontë's novel to the early version of Nell. In the beginning of the story, Isabella usually represents proper Victorian femininity, even if she is a bit spoiled and selfish. The similarities, however, end there, for, unlike Nell, Isabella spends many of her formative years in a stable home with both a mother and father present, the best possible example of the domestic space in Brontë's story. She does become orphaned at a relatively young age, but she experienced a tremendous amount of their influence before her parents died. Also different from Nell, Isabella remains contained within the domestic space of Thrushcross Grange, properly sheltered in the domestic space away from corrupting influences, as there is no indication that she ever leaves before her marriage to Heathcliff. As a child, she also never experiences Nell's crisis of itinerancy, and readers easily associate Isabella's first encounter with corrupted characters and Gypsiness when she meets the Earnshaw children.

Isabella, up until this meeting sheltered from anything improper, immediately recognizes Heathcliff as a figure of danger when he and Catherine are dragged into the Linton home after being spotted spying on the family. Upon seeing Heathcliff and Cathy for the first time, her reaction to the two children is very different. While she and her family are "full of stupid admiration" (51) for Cathy, Isabella specifically says that Heathcliff is a "[f]rightful thing...exactly like the son of the fortune-teller, that stole my tame pheasant" (50). Isabella, spoiled and sheltered as she is, is shocked by Heathcliff during this early encounter, seeing his Gypsiness as something to abhor.

Later in the novel, however, when Heathcliff returns to the narrative after a long absence, sophisticated and no longer looking like a dirty street urchin or Gypsy, Isabella forgets what she knew of him before and sees him as a potential suitor. Her previous dislike of him disappears,

and she suddenly sees Heathcliff “not [as] a fiend...[but as] an honourable soul, and a true one” (103). Though Catherine tells her that she has been fooled by appearances and does not comprehend the reality of Heathcliff’s character, Isabella refuses to listen and becomes seduced by the dark man in gentleman’s clothing. She begins to act unpredictably, running off and marrying Heathcliff in a move perhaps inspired by the influence of the rebellious Catherine, now her sister through marriage and a constant companion. Isabella, once in the presence of Catherine and Heathcliff together, loses her previous adherence to custom and tradition, and she begins to act out of self-interest rather than for the good of her family’s welfare. She also loses the common sense derived from the moral influence of her parents.

Seemingly, Isabella’s obsession with Heathcliff ends up propelling her into a state of Gypsiness, and it is her intimate association with him that usually causes readers to think of *him* as contaminating the girl and forcing her to remove herself from the protection of her family—and of the domestic. At first, readers might associate her disappearance with the tales of Gypsies kidnapping English children, for Heathcliff, according to a maid, ““run off wi’ her...not long after midnight,”” perhaps seducing her into flight in the same way a Gypsy might tempt a naïve child to leave his or her home with treats or adventure (132). Of course, however, Isabella was not coerced into running away with Heathcliff; she went voluntarily and made a conscious decision to abandon her home in favor of being with Heathcliff. She leaves the stable Linton home by her own decision and will; and, even though Heathcliff “pressed [Isabella to] just mount his horse and away with him” (130), there is no indication that he kidnapped her. Nor does Edgar Linton, her brother, believe this to be the case, for he later says, ““She went of her own accord; she had a right to go if she pleased. Trouble me no more about her. Hereafter she is only my sister in name: not because I disown her, but because she has disowned me”” (133). In the details

of Isabella's decision to leave the Grange, Brontë makes clear that Isabella's choice of independence comes with consequences (though there is no indication at this point in the novel that her elopement with Heathcliff will lead to her death). As far as the reader is concerned, Isabella may not have made an honorable decision, but she does marry the man she runs off with and she does move into his home.

The decision to travel with her Gypsy husband, far away from any domestic influences that might persuade her to reconsider, signals the official moment of Isabella's permanent contamination. The reader may not recognize this at first, for there is always hope for Isabella, due to her good breeding. Away from the familiarity of Thrushcross Grange, an influence that will remain with her even after she deliberately leaves it, Isabella realizes that she and Heathcliff could not possibly be similar in any way. Her situation becomes infinitely worse once she exchanges the symbolic adoption of Gypsiness in her flight with the literal absorption of Gypsiness (or, as shown in the Birkbeck article, primitive and shocking sexuality) into her body during her marriage to Heathcliff. Her recognition that she has chosen the wrong path first reveals itself when she asks Nelly Dean in a letter written shortly after her elopement: "Is Mr Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil? ...I beseech you to explain, if you can, what I have married" (136).⁵ Unable to identify him as anything like what she thought she knew of him before, Isabella seeks to identify Heathcliff as at least of the human species. The deeper racial implications would not be lost on the Victorian reader, for just as the journalists

⁵ The letter Isabella Linton writes to Nelly Dean is especially important, as Judith E. Pike points out in "‘My name *was* Isabella Linton’: Coverture, Domestic Violence, and Mrs. Heathcliff's Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*." Not only does the letter form the subject matter for a chapter of the novel, it is also "an intimate portrait of domestic abuse within a middle-class setting" presented in such a way that readers should see it as evidence that Brontë meant for readers to see "something valuable" in "Isabella's character and her narrative" (354). Pike also explores how Brontë is carefully addressing the issue of domestic violence throughout *Wuthering Heights*.

tried to identify the foreign nature of Gypsies in order to establish difference between the savages and themselves, Isabella also feels that she has been thrown into an alien society of savagery.

In the process of trying to adapt to her new life (clearly a life she is ill suited for), she begins to lose her own identity. When making her decision to leave the Grange, she could only imagine herself as Mrs. Heathcliff, wife of a middle-class, handsome man; as the reality of that mistaken perception becomes realized, she begins to lose that vision of herself. Marriage to Heathcliff, a man seemingly of another species and certainly who is the literal embodiment of Gypsiness, forces the once pure English woman to wither and become, literally, scarred—much like Nell after being exposed to wandering. When she finally escapes Heathcliff, she appears back at her childhood home, in a dress “that clung to her with wet...[with] a deep cut under one ear...a white face scratched and bruised, and a frame hardly able to support itself through fatigue” (172). Isabella is a battered wife, but also in this passage Brontë reveals the changes internalized by Isabella. Her body is not modestly covered, for the dress “clung to her,” revealing all, and her face is marred with dark colors. Though she escapes Heathcliff and runs away, pregnant with his child, Isabella cannot survive her experience with her husband and her time away from the Grange. The “scratch[es] and bruise[s]” will fade, but the experience will live with her. The outcome is simple and predictable—she must die an early death. Like Nell, though she had the ability to be a vessel of goodness (though not in the inborn way of Oliver or Nell), Isabella’s choice—originally in running away and then coupling with a literal Gypsy—signals that her corruption is beyond redemption.

Just as Nell soon recognizes that her itinerancy and association with Gypsiness have soiled her, Isabella also realizes that her own actions have led her to destruction. Though Isabella

will waste away and die far from her family, orphaned once more (this time from her brother when he expels her from his life), she endures her fate with the son she has by Heathcliff. Called Linton, the child emerges contaminated at birth and is described as “an ailing, peevish creature” (183). The two live in solitude, away from any relation, until Isabella’s weakened frame finally gives out. Again, Brontë reenacts the death of little Nell in the outcome of Isabella; however, she also allows readers to imagine what might have happened had Nell survived long enough to procreate. Even if she didn’t choose a life of itinerancy, if Nell chose poorly, marrying a man like Heathcliff who is, according to Victorian middle-class values, a totally different species than herself, she would end up dead anyway—and so would her children.

And Linton, Isabella’s son, in fact, does die. The effeminate child (a clear marker of male abnormality in novels written during this time) cannot cope with life. His genetic association with the weak-willed Isabella and the seemingly morally and racially corrupt Heathcliff doom him from the start.⁶ Heathcliff, recognizing the flaws in the child but only blaming Isabella for his condition, scornfully declares, ““Thou art thy mother’s child, entirely! Where is *my* share in thee, puling chicken?”” (297). The boy is a legitimate nightmarish version of Oliver Twist, born of violence, hate, and corruption rather than love. He never develops authenticity and is easily frightened and manipulated by Heathcliff, causing those around him to never know how to judge the boy. In the end, the child becomes a repulsive degraded version of Victorian masculinity, destined to die—all due to the actions his mother chose during her youth.

⁶ A fascinating analysis of Cathy Linton’s marriage to Linton Heathcliff is seen in Juliet McMaster’s “The Courtship and Honeymoon of Mr. and Mrs. Linton Heathcliff: Emily Brontë’s Sexual Imagery.” McMaster examines Cathy Linton’s marriage to Linton Heathcliff, but she also acknowledges that Linton is destined for an early death because he “combin[es] the worst characteristics of both his parents.... Linton is the bad seed, the degenerate offspring whose death will allow for a new and vigorous growth [in the novel]” (1).

Isabella, however corrupted she may be, has very little influence on the novel's outcome. Instead, it is the creation of Catherine, and her relationship to Heathcliff and everyone else during the course of the story, that determines the final outcome. Catherine is an amplified Gothic version of Nell. Both come from unstable homes and both begin to wander from the domestic space early in life, taking journeys that corrupt them completely. Nell, however, resists corruption at every turn, wandering out of necessity while Brontë's Catherine embodies a type of Gypsiness from the time readers meet her. She runs wild as a child, behaving questionably on the moors when alone with Heathcliff and conducting herself less than properly when at home. Rather than wanting to stay close to home in her childhood, Catherine takes to wandering through the countryside. Though not a Gypsy in fact, she embraces the Gypsy lifestyle as her own symbolically through her contact and time spent with her brother/playmate/lover, Heathcliff. Because she has no guidance and has been allowed to stray so far from the home, Catherine cannot develop into a proper middle-class Victorian female; and, because of this, she poses a mortal threat to all of those around her.

Catherine's family, though perhaps not as well off as the Lintons, is still middle class. The Earnshaws, however, can only be considered middle class due to their economic positioning—not because of their adherence to a middle-class value system. In this respect, the family, through its lack of respect for the home, morality, and gendered versions of authenticity, becomes a vile and perverted version of a middle-class family from the Victorian point of view. Such a degraded family should not be allowed to endure in its state of corruption; and, through the portrayal of Catherine, Brontë reinforces Dickens's point that a female who violates her proper position in middle-class life must die in the end.

Catherine's early childhood, though spent in the confines of the Heights and surrounding countryside, is not ideal, and early in the novel, Brontë reveals that the Earnshaw parents are clearly neglecting to morally educate their children. Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw appear uninterested in their approach to child rearing, only taking notice of Catherine and Hindley when their boisterous behavior becomes too much to take. Rather than instilling love, piety, morality, and filial devotion in their children, ensuring proper moral and gender development, the Earnshaw parents slap or shuffle their children away as if they are temporary nuisances—but only when not absent. This type of absentee parenting is emphasized by the journey away from the home that Mr. Earnshaw takes early in the novel. Physical and emotional separation between parent and child is obvious, but even more devastating is the fact that the father travels away from the home, and, upon his return, significantly alters and contaminates the space forever. With the appearance of Heathcliff, a dirty child of suspected Gypsy origins, Brontë alerts the reader to the idea that bringing in something foreign into an English home that is already suffering from neglect may lead to disaster. Unlike the Lintons who, because they have a more stable domestic life, immediately oust Heathcliff from their home, the Earnshaws, even though most of them resent Heathcliff's presence, bring him in as a new member of the household. Most readers interpret the decision to keep Heathcliff as the founding moment of the family's demise.⁷ And, in some ways, it is. Heathcliff, however, is the least of their worries, because the legitimate Earnshaw children are already degraded past possible redemption.

⁷ Amongst other articles, Paul Cheetham's "*Wuthering Heights*: The Problem of Heathcliff" provides a strong exploration of Heathcliff's character. He equates Heathcliff with a monster when the child is presented to the other children at Wuthering Heights, and he cites numerous comparisons between Heathcliff and John Milton's version of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Because Heathcliff is labeled as evil from such an early age, his role as a child in a middle-class family becomes even more complex, opening up not only discussions about Victorian views about childhood but also about nineteenth-century arguments about adoption, class, and race.

Rather than recoiling in terror from Heathcliff as the Lintons did, the Earnshaw children react quite differently; and Catherine's reaction, especially, must have frightened and shocked the Victorian audience. When she saw Heathcliff for the first time, she "showed her humour by grinning and spitting at the stupid little thing" (37). Rather than the deferential ideal little girl or an obedient daughter admiring her father's decisions, Cathy turns atavistic, behaving in a way more primitive than the actual savage (as they perceive Heathcliff) in front of them behaves. Catherine's reaction is central to Brontë's core argument. She is a figure of corruption and neglect long before Heathcliff's arrival, and her behavior proves it. Unlike Nell, Cathy has never been exposed to even a marginally acceptable home. Therefore, she has nothing positive to provide stability for her character even though, like little Nell, Catherine Earnshaw is a young, middle-class female who should, at least on paper, have a bright future. Her spoiled and violent personality appears to be the product of parental neglect, for no one teaches the child proper behavior but instead only strikes or scolds her in "peevish reproofs [that] wakened in her a naughty delight to provoke" her father (43).

As Nelly Dean explains, "[Catherine] was never so happy as when we were all scolding her at once, and she defying us with her bold, saucy look, and her ready words; turning Joseph's religious curses into ridicule, baiting me, and doing just what her father hated most.... [B]eing repulsed continually hardened her" (43). Because of her origins in a household uninterested in her proper development, she is already an aberration when her story begins. As time passes and she and Heathcliff form a bond, Catherine absorbs Heathcliff into her being, and she becomes a version of Nell that is much more dangerous than any attempt Dickens makes to Gothicize the child in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Cathy never radiates softness, purity, or domesticity. Her attraction to Heathcliff becomes both unsettling and horrifying, moving so far beyond natural

boundaries that Catherine even emerges as an aberration of the traditional Gothic heroine. In her proximity to Heathcliff, closer than anyone else to the foreign “other” and willingly adopting all that he comes to represent very early on in the novel, Catherine emerges as a Gothic villain rather than as a Gothic heroine.

Critics often point to the Gothic qualities of *Wuthering Heights*, and, usually, these scholars point to the commonalities between Cathy’s and Heathcliff’s relationship and those between heroines and villains in Gothic novels. In general, these stories center around a pure (and, usually, very white and British) young girl whose innocence is essential to identifying the sexual danger implicit in the story. In fact, it is the threat of sexual danger that drives her narrative, for “[t]ransgressive sexual relations are an undeniable common denominator of the Gothic...terror [as it is presented in the Gothic novel] is almost always sexual terror, and fear, flight, incarceration, and escape are almost always coloured by the exoticism of transgressive sexual aggression” (Haggerty 157). Whereas in most cases sexual “transgress[ion]” would only be associated with a male (or a female who would later become reformed), in *Wuthering Heights*, readers experience a “transgressive sexual aggression” even more horrifying, because both the male and the female are equally “transgressive.” Whereas in *The Old Curiosity Shop* only Nell, the pure girl frequently found in earlier Gothic fiction, is in danger, here Brontë transforms Catherine into an aberration that has its roots in the neglect of her family to adopt and enact middle-class values. Brontë makes clear that the stakes for middle-class survival are much higher in her story than they were in Dickens’s novel. A child subjected to Nell’s or Catherine’s lifestyle is not only doomed but also, because she is female, is capable of mutating into a lower form of animal. The clear association with Gypsies or Gypsiness only serves to alert the reader as to how bad her situation has become. In reality, however, Catherine has always been the

savage. She is a mutated female who demonstrates sexuality or dominance, transgressing both gender and class.

As Catherine begins to internalize Heathcliff, a real Gypsy, as herself more and more, especially after she becomes an orphan, she loses all sense of propriety and domestic interest. The Gothic trope should be complete and more horrifying than anything produced in the eighteenth century, empowering Heathcliff to become an overwhelming force for change and destruction; however, there is a reverse effect upon Heathcliff that results from this internalization. The more Cathy adopts Heathcliff as her own (as her own brother and eventually as her own soul), the more he loses the ability to enact Victorian authentic masculinity. Heathcliff becomes submissive in character, content to follow in Catherine's footsteps and stay close to home. His ability to frighten disappears as Catherine becomes masculinized through her attachment to him. Powerful signs of the danger to the middle-class's survival emerge when readers begin to see Catherine as the dominant figure in the Earnshaw household, especially even when Hindley returns. Catherine's destruction of middle-class homes—and, by default, middle-class masculinity—begins tearing down the males in her own home simply by her very presence. Though her brother blusters and petulantly defends his birthright as master of the Heights, even he recognizes Catherine's dominance and his own weakness. Because Hindley never had proper exposure to the feminine domestic (due to his ineffective mother and father), even when he leaves and returns with his own wife it is to a home that remains unchanged—soiled beyond redemption. When he returns, he cannot enact positive change because he has no idea how to act as a proper male.

Catherine refers to her brother as a “detestable substitute” for their father (20). Indeed, Hindley is, for though he should take responsibility for Catherine and Heathcliff, and rein in their

rebellious behavior, Hindley and his new wife (the new parental figures in the novel) behave “like two babies, kissing and talking nonsense by the hour” (21). His negligence mirrors that of his father’s—as does his rough treatment of his siblings and his own son. Once his wife dies, he loses interest in his role as head of the house even more, abandoning all responsibility to the women and indulging in alcoholic stupors.

Readers do not discover much about Catherine’s interaction with Hindley during this time. Usually, she disappears into her room or out of the scene when he enters, signaling to the reader that she is afraid of him. Perhaps, however, this is a misreading. Catherine seems to recognize that Hindley is simply a non-issue and attention spent on him a waste of her time. Instead, it is more fruitful to observe her actions with Heathcliff. Even though he was a powerful influence and favored child in the home when Mr. Earnshaw was alive, once he has been made an orphan in fact and has only Cathy to cling to (especially during the years while Hindley is gone from the narrative), he changes utterly. Heathcliff’s influence disappears totally and he becomes subordinate to Cathy, who actually surpasses him in power. If anything, while in her presence, he is less dominant, often allowing her to have her way or hiding from her. Susan Meyers argues in *Imperialism at Home* that the relationship with the Gypsy Heathcliff allows Catherine “to resist a constraining female social role [that] is figured through her identity with the ‘dark races’” (104). Catherine, when declaring, “I *am* Heathcliff!”, transcends race and gender, and, as Meyer explains, this moment “gives Heathcliff, and through him the ‘dark races,’ an exceptionally fully realized status” (107). Her analysis provides a fascinating starting point for considering questions of race and identity in Brontë’s novel; however a closer reading of Heathcliff and Catherine’s relationship indicates that though her association with him might give a “realized status” to the foreign other that is Heathcliff, it is a “status” that is far from “fully

realized.” His path does become “realized” to a certain extent (though his marriage fails and his offspring does not survive), and Heathcliff fulfills many of the requirements of masculine characters—but his success is fully independent of Catherine. Catherine’s association with Heathcliff’s Gypsiness and parentless status on such a deep level ultimately causes her to form a corrupt authenticity that denies any character the ability to be “fully realized” while she is alive.

Because she helped destroy her own family, Catherine poses an extreme threat to the Lintons when she joins them through marriage. The adult Catherine—though a frightening mutation of the Victorian woman—becomes a domestic figure through her marriage to Edgar, and the results are devastating. Catherine’s danger to the Lintons becomes horrifyingly clear when her marriage to Edgar brings her (and her morally corrupt nature) into the established middle-class Linton home. She is Dickens’s fear realized: Nell, tainted, as a middle-class woman in charge of cultivating a domestic space. Catherine (and Nell, had she been allowed what would seem to be such a positive fate) is a body of infection that corrupts the home and family from the inside out.

Though the reader does not witness the earliest days of the Linton marriage, Nelly explains that Edgar soon loses his position of authority (in a similar way to Heathcliff’s loss of influence in his relationship with Catherine). Nelly “observed that Mr Edgar had a deep-rooted fear of ruffling her humour...[and] Catherine had seasons of gloom and silence,...[and Edgar] respected [these moods] with sympathizing silence” (92). Edgar’s situation grows even more precarious upon Heathcliff’s return to the narrative, and he becomes subordinate completely to his wife (81). As the Linton household begins to disintegrate under her influence, Cathy grows more and more degraded, suddenly appearing to mutate into an inhuman creature. When Edgar, who views Heathcliff as the source of all of Cathy’s problems, attempts to deny her the right to

see him, Cathy “dash[ed] her head against the arm of the sofa, and gr[ound] her teeth, so that you might fancy she would crash them to splinters.” Her reaction could be viewed as insanity, yet perhaps it is more closely aligned with primitive acts of animalistic dominance. Edgar’s reaction is one of complete separation and helplessness, as he “stood looking at her in sudden compunction and fear” (118). Mirroring Isabella’s realizations about Heathcliff, Edgar sees that Catherine is not of the same makeup as himself, and his “fear” of her is the first sign of Catherine’s enactment of a dual state of Gypsiness and orphanhood even within the confines of her marriage. The implications are horrifyingly Gothic: the monster in disguise has invaded the sacred space in the most perverse form.

Catherine’s physical and mental states continue to decline, and the consequences are felt by the entire family. Interestingly, once Catherine is dead, however, domestic happiness reigns in the Linton household for a time. The Gypsy-orphan has been removed from the home and the family remaining attempts to survive. And it is at this point that Heathcliff regains his narrative dominance. It is only through Catherine’s death that Heathcliff’s character and power become fully “realized.”

B. Heathcliff “Realized”

Understanding Heathcliff’s role in *Wuthering Heights* has plagued readers and scholars since the novel’s publication. Clearly a protagonist, he is hardly likable, yet many are reluctant to call him a villain. His humanity visibly emerges in his love for Catherine, yet his violent nature and actions prohibit his being labeled a model Victorian hero. In fact he is neither and both—and he is also a literary relation to Dickens’s own fictional heroes. As a revision of *Oliver Twist* in a novel containing new versions of little Nell, Heathcliff faces challenges unafforded to Oliver, for

though he does progress successfully on his own in the world, the experience of Catherine repeats and corrupts him twice. In the portrayal of Heathcliff, Brontë proves that the outward success of *Oliver Twist* as an adult can be attained by a male character who is an orphan and tainted by Gypsiness (figurative in the case of Oliver, literal in that of Heathcliff). Even though Heathcliff appears to succeed in the world, however, he really cannot be allowed to leave a positive legacy if all stages of his development are not completed.

Within the character of Heathcliff, Brontë exhibits the best and the worst of middle-class mobility. He enters the family as a (seemingly) complete outsider, but, even before his introduction to the rest of the Earnshaw family, he manages to exert power over Mr. Earnshaw. When Earnshaw brings the child home, he is described as an object “as dark almost as if it came from the devil” and often referred to as “it” (36). Interestingly, he is also portrayed as distinctly foreign and subhuman, not merely due to his dark appearance but also because he seems incapable of intelligent speech (intelligent to the Earnshaws, in any case).

But Heathcliff soon manages to become a significant presence in the home, no longer an “it” that “nobody could understand” (36-37). Heathcliff’s natural power and dominance become obvious early on in his tenure with the family—as long as Mr. Earnshaw is alive. Though Nelly Dean explains that early on “Miss Cathy and he were...very thick,” most of Heathcliff’s time as a child is spent marking his dominance over the male Earnshaws. Even before Heathcliff learns English, Earnshaw “christened him ‘Heathcliff’...the name of a son who died in childhood” (37-38). Mixing identities of the legitimate inheritor (perhaps a son who would have been older even than Hindley and therefore the rightful heir) and an adopted orphan of no account, sets the stage for Heathcliff to “bre[ed] bad feeling in the house” (38). The word choice is interesting because to allow Heathcliff to “bre[ed]” something, even a feeling, is an indication of his agency and

power to contaminate the legitimate family members. Heathcliff's ability to "bre[ed]" anything is the ultimate threat, for he, at least at this point in the novel, is representative of everything the middle class opposes.

Heathcliff's ability to persuade is an act of "bre[eding]," for it performs a type of enchantment on Earnshaw, making him "[take] to Heathcliff strangely, believing all he said (for that matter, he said precious little, and generally the truth), and petting him up far above Cathy, who was too mischievous and wayward for a favourite" (38). He turns the household into complete chaos and makes what should be false into the truth. Heathcliff forces Hindley to "regard his father as an oppressor rather than a friend, and [Hindley saw] Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent's affections, and his privileges" (38). To establish dominance over the household as a viable male inheritor, Heathcliff instinctively knows that he must take precedence in the family line and become the favorite. His infiltration of the home as a Gypsy child among children in a long-established English lineage is horrifying on both a Gothic and a contemporary level. His "usurp[ing]" of inheritance from the Earnshaw heir, even if it is only temporary in the beginning (though it will materialize later), mimics Gothic plot devices but it also shows what can happen if a morally unstable symbol of itinerancy invades an equally unstable English home. That home, because of the invasion of this Gypsy orphan and his corruption of the domestic space and of the other children who also become orphans and lose all hope of having a stable domestic center, is doomed from the beginning of the story. *Wuthering Heights* becomes a narrative not about two lovers but about how to reclaim the stability of the middle-class Earnshaw family and home.

As time goes on, Heathcliff begins to change. Though his sway over Cathy was strong in their early days, he soon becomes the one at the mercy of her more dominant personality once Mr. Earnshaw dies. By making him a slavish devotee to Catherine, Brontë surprisingly begins to

strip the Gypsy of his legendary physical stamina and sexual power—and that power has been transferred to Catherine in a way that unmans him. It forces him into the position of the female, and he becomes trapped in the domestic during a time in his life when he should have made his first break with it. The more the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff grows, the more Heathcliff hovers around the home (even long after a middle-class boy should have left it), awaiting Catherine's every move. He loses the ability to think and act on his own and instead becomes subject to Catherine's will. His feminization and the reversal of roles remove any ability of his own to be authentic or to progress in the steps of the middle-class male child. On the surface, at this point in the story, this seems insignificant because Heathcliff is visualized as a member of a class below even the servants, but he recognizes that he must walk the correct path of middle-class males if he hopes to attain Catherine and a rightful place in the Earnshaw family.

But most surprising is what happens when Heathcliff breaks free of Catherine. Heathcliff, feeling unloved after overhearing only part of Catherine's thoughts about him when she debates the meaning of love with Nelly, leaves—a move that turns out to be the most important for him in terms of his actual solidification as a member of the middle class. As outlined earlier, young men were expected to experience three stages of development (infancy surrounded by domestic influences, a break with the domestic to enter the all-male world of school, and a return to the domestic as a fully-qualified provider upon completion of school and establishment in a career). Heathcliff, of course, cannot attend school, especially because he has no access to funds and has received scant education up until this point. When he leaves the Heights (or the domestic), he is in his mid- to late teens. When he returns, years later, Nelly Dean's descriptions indicate that Heathcliff has indeed returned as a man—and not just any man, but a successful, middle-class man.

Upon his return to the Heights, Heathcliff appears at Thrushcross Grange, Catherine's new home she shares with her husband, Edgar Linton. He surprises Nelly with his "deep voice" that was "foreign in tone...yet...familiar." She describes him as "a tall man dressed in dark clothes, with a dark face and hair...[who] held his fingers on the latch [of the door], as if intending to open [it] for himself," his face "half covered with black whiskers" (93). Though these details might be seen as benign, they actually reveal important clues about Heathcliff's social standing at this point in the novel. He has proven himself in an outside community (though, exactly how, readers do not know), and he bears the superficial, physical markers of middle-class gentlemen, especially in his dress.⁸ Additionally, his "fingers on the latch, as if intending to open [it]" is a detail that indicates his role as both equal and dark, foreign invader (a hint of the theme of reverse colonization fears that Meyer also explores). As Nelly explains, there seems to be a balance in play in his character at this point in the novel. She explains that when she and the Lintons (importantly, members of both the middle and working classes) observe Heathcliff, it was if they "[beheld]" a Heathcliff "transform[ed]", who:

...had grown [into a] tall, athletic, well-formed man; beside whom my master seemed quite slender and youth-like. His upright carriage suggested the idea of his having been in the army. His countenance was much older in expression and decision of feature than Mr. Linton's; it looked intelligent, and retained no marks of former degradation. A half-civilized ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows, and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified, quite divested of roughness though too stern for grace. (96)

It is important that not only Edgar Linton and Catherine recognize the change in Heathcliff; and, perhaps, it is more significant that Nelly gives readers this description because it most clearly

⁸ For more information about middle-class male fashion during the nineteenth century, please see David Kuchta's *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550-1850* (Univ. of California Press, 2002). Kuchta proposes that middle-class men saw themselves as "genuine depositories of sober English feeling," a trait reflected in their dress (136). The concept of sobriety in dress and action mark a man as a middle-class gentleman, as seen in both *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

shows the difference between their classes and the fact that Nelly accepts his position as a superior. Though his foreignness still lurks beneath the surface, visible only in certain facial features and intensity of expression, those qualities seem of less importance taking into consideration the rest of his appearance.

Heathcliff has fulfilled most of the requirements of middle-class men. He has left the domestic space and control of women and, though he did not go to school, he did end up somewhere and learned something because he made a fortune and learned new ways to exhibit his dominance over the fading Hindley, as he proves when he manages to win Hindley's birthright from him in a gamble. His return to the Heights and his ownership over it is an attempt to instate himself as fully male. Additionally, his presence causes an instinctive reaction in Catherine that visibly aligns her more fully with him than with her husband. When she sees Heathcliff for the first time after his long absence, she becomes "breathless and wild, too excited to show gladness; indeed, by her face you would rather have surmised an awful calamity" (95). Heathcliff's influence over Edgar's wife, and even Edgar's servant, Nelly, for a short while, indicate his role as a powerful competitor for Edgar.

More significant, however, is the implication that Heathcliff's separation from Catherine allowed him not only to progress healthily (if unconventionally) into the next phase of his life as a middle-class male but also that he succeeded better than most legitimate members of that class. Instinctively, he knows that he must return to the Heights and the Grange to attempt to fulfill the next stage of his life: a return to domesticity. Surprisingly, however, Heathcliff begins to change in Catherine's presence, almost reverting back to what he was before he left the Heights. Though he may be controlled in other situations, Catherine still has the ability to make him feel inferior; and he, once again, begins to wither beneath her power. As Heathcliff attempts to found his

own male dominance in the Linton household, “gradually establish[ing] his right to be expected,” even though he doesn’t live there, he begins to revert back to his pre-departure behavior. He “retained a great deal of the reserve for which his boyhood was remarkable, and that served to repress all startling demonstrations of feeling” (100). Nelly’s notice of this trait might simply refer to proper masculine reserve, but her future descriptions indicate a regression. Edgar Linton, as he tells his sister, recognizes that “though [Heathcliff’s] exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable, and unchanged” (101). Indeed, Heathcliff continues to defer to all of Catherine’s decisions and ideas, leaving everything up to Catherine “as [she] advise[s]” (107).

Heathcliff reverts back to his childish whining and pleading with Catherine, so out of keeping with his new appearance and attitude at the beginning of his return, saying, “I want you to be aware that I *know* you have treated me infernally – infernally!...and if you think I can be consoled by sweet words you are an idiot – and if you fancy I’ll suffer unrevenge, I’ll convince you of the contrary, in a very little while!” (112). Though the words sound threatening, his hurried speech mimics that of a tantrum-throwing child. As he clarifies, he still would never hurt Catherine, and Brontë’s use of dialogue is telling:

‘I seek no revenge on you,’ replied Heathcliff less vehemently. ... ‘You are welcome to torture me to death for your amusement, only, allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style – And refrain from insult, as much as you are able. Having leveled my palace, don’t erect a hovel and complacently admire your own charity in giving me that for a home....’ (112)

As is evident from his choice of words, masochistically authorizing Catherine to retain her position of authority over him, asking her to “allow” him to act in particular ways, Heathcliff cannot progress properly as a man as long as he is in Catherine’s presence. While being without a home and orphaned helped him succeed away from her, near Catherine those same traits are liabilities to his success as a middle-class man. She doesn’t provide a home but a “hovel,” and

she wants to keep him in a state of orphanhood at a stage in his life when he should be returning to the domestic.

This trend continues through the point of Catherine's death, and Heathcliff cannot recognize his flaw in seeking out Catherine as the remedy to fulfilling the last stage in his life—that of a man with a wife and a home. He married Isabella out of spite and will be duly punished for it, but it is his attachment to Catherine that is his true downfall in the world. Even at her deathbed, when she is at her weakest in body and strength, he succumbs to her power. When he sees her deteriorated form, he cannot imagine living without her, and tells her so in “a tone that did not seek to disguise his despair” (168). But Catherine seizes a final opportunity to exhibit dominance over Heathcliff, reducing him to a physical position lower than her as he “knelt on one knee to embrace her.” Even when “he attempted to rise, . . . she seized his hair, and kept him down.” He struggles with his emotions, “wrenching his head free [of her], and grinding his teeth” in a move that authenticates his corruption, making him enact Catherine's earlier animalistic behavior and lose all semblance of middle-class masculinity (169). He weeps and returns to the primitive appearance he had in childhood. Nelly explains that though she tried to go near him, he “gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog, and gathered [Catherine] to him with greedy jealousy. I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species; it appeared that he would not understand, though I spoke to him; so, I stood off, and held my tongue, in great perplexity” (162).⁹ No other moment in the novel takes Heathcliff back to the closest thing the reader has as his origin—the child newly introduced at the Heights who looks like a dirty little animal, who speaks no English and cannot understand others who merely look at him in

⁹ Admittedly, the discussion of Nelly Dean's accuracy as a narrator is a subject capable of igniting debate amongst scholars. In this instance, however, her testimony of Heathcliff's frenzied state in Catherine's presence can be backed up by Mr. Lockwood, who repeatedly notes Heathcliff's animalistic behavior and passionate responses to all matters related to Catherine.

curiosity. From his progression he has regressed—little Oliver falling into degradation after success.

C. The Middle Class Recovered: *Wuthering Heights*, Book Two; or, Brontë Tries Again

Heathcliff never fully recovers from Catherine's death, but he does stabilize somewhat and manages to hold on to his fortune and the Heights. He disappears from the narrative for a long period of time, and it is during this lapse that the reader is introduced to the new generations populating the novel. It is within this second half of the novel that Brontë explores how the middle class can recover from such a catastrophic outcome presented by failed *Oliver Twists* and Gothicized little Nells. For several chapters, the reader begins to learn about the young Catherine (Cathy) Linton. Though the original Catherine dies shortly after childbirth, her influence remains an element of suspense. The remainder of the plot hinges upon whether or not anything can be rehabilitated in this decaying world—and all of the focus turns to the future of Catherine's daughter, Cathy Linton. What becomes most intriguing, however, is not Cathy's story but instead how all is redeemed through Heathcliff's interactions with the second generation of Earnshaws and Lintons.

Before a first meeting with Heathcliff, Cathy Linton's earliest years are described in idealistic terms: little Cathy, raised by her father in the purity of the Grange, was:

[T]he most winning thing that ever brought sunshine into a desolate house.... Her spirit was high, though not rough, and qualified by a heart, sensitive and lively to excess in its affections. That capacity for intense attachments reminded [Nelly] of her mother; still she did not resemble her; for she could be soft and mild as a dove, and she had a gentle voice, and pensive expression: her anger was never furious; her love never fierce; it was deep and tender. (189)

Still, this is a toned down version of the original Catherine—and an idealized little Nell. It is no accident that Brontë skips from the moment of her birth to her twelfth year. Up until this point,

the indication appears to be that Heathcliff's presence as a symbolic character simply is not necessary. The experiment Brontë attempts to show is yet another retelling of little Nell's plot—this time with a purified version of a child who never wanders from home, is good and obedient, and who has never encountered the Gypsy nature of her mother—even though she carries her blood within her. The introduction of Heathcliff into little Cathy's plot must take place during puberty, for this is the moment that will be the true test of the child's inheritance and the larger question for the audience: can a female child who comes from a morally corrupt mother survive to create a satisfactory middle-class home and family?

Her future is constructed carefully by her father. Nelly explains that Edgar “took her education entirely on himself...[and] she learnt rapidly and eagerly, and did honour to his teaching” (189). And, like little Nell who happily lives in a permanent structure until her thirteenth year, “Till the age of thirteen, [little Cathy] had not once been beyond the range of the park by herself” (190). It is at this point in her life, however, that natural rebellion strikes, and Cathy takes it upon herself to leave the protection of the Grange without permission; and it is in this first act of wandering that she encounters Heathcliff's protégé—her cousin and eventual husband, Hareton Earnshaw.

What is fascinating about this encounter is that Cathy ends up at Heathcliff's home, horrified to learn when Nelly arrives that Hareton is her cousin. Still, as Nelly looks around her former home, she notices an important change: “the house, inside, had regained its ancient aspect of comfort under female management; and the scenes of riot common in Hindley's time were not now enacted within its walls” (197). Without the ultimate corruptive influence of Catherine Earnshaw to distract him, Heathcliff has resumed the cultivation of his middle-class lifestyle,

appearing to make it his goal to restore the home to its symbolic domestic glory and peace (as much as it can be under Heathcliff's rule).

Chastised for her adventures, Cathy reluctantly promises not to wander again on her own, but she does come across Heathcliff for the first time three years later. While out exploring with Nelly, suddenly she breaks away and is soon "two miles nearer Wuthering Heights than her own home" when Nelly witnesses two men, "one of whom [she] felt convinced was Mr Heathcliff himself" take hold of the girl and accuse her of poaching. Rather than being afraid of Heathcliff, Cathy appears intrigued and drawn to Heathcliff who bears at this point in the novel an "ill-meaning smile" (213).

Nelly clearly worries that Cathy carries a predisposed genetic affection for Heathcliff, and wonders that the child "gave him several looks, as if she could not exactly make up her mind what to think of him; but now he smiled when he met her eye, and softened his voice in addressing her, and I was foolish enough to imagine the memory of her mother might disarm him from desiring her injury" (215). Though this early affection between the two will not last, Heathcliff clearly intends a type of seduction in winning the new Cathy over in this initial introduction. Soon the "young lady" turns into an "uncivil little thing" who "stood on tiptoe, and whispered a sentence in Heathcliff's ear" (218). Everything in the plot has been building to this moment; and, once again, Brontë emphasizes that it is the risk of Gypsy infection that can destroy a family. The future of the middle-class families in *Wuthering Heights* depends upon Heathcliff as long as he is alive. He has made a place for himself successfully in the middle-class, and now he has not only his dead love's daughter in his home, but also his own legitimate son Linton (who came to live with him after Isabella's death). The stage is set, at this point, for Heathcliff to ensure that his family line survives.

Unfortunately for Heathcliff, his son is tainted from birth with genetic weakness. It is inevitable that the child will not survive long, especially once he is handed over to his father's rough care after Isabella dies. The implication that Linton is weakened by the dual taint of Isabella's moral instability and Heathcliff's corrupted bloodline presents an explicit danger to Cathy Linton. Her own future is at risk should she move to the Heights, marry Linton, and become infected by the Gypsiness that surrounds the Heathcliffs, something her father ardently tried to prevent by shielding her from the Heights and secluding her within the confines of the Grange during her formative years. Indeed, when this future is acted upon, though no children result from the union between Linton and Cathy, she, under the influences of Heathcliff and the environment at the Heights, begins to mutate into a degraded being. Gone is the child of "sunshine;" Cathy becomes a shrewish "little witch" capable of fixing those around her with "sincere horror" rather than smiles (14). It is only her association with Heathcliff that produces this change, for Linton dies soon after their union. Heathcliff, without an ounce of emotional response, seeks revenge on the original Catherine by repeating the corruption through her daughter.

But consistently lurking in the background is a character of enormous importance who allows readers to view Heathcliff totally differently. Hareton Earnshaw, son of Hindley, has survived among the ruins of his family, the last bearer of the Earnshaw name—the true heir of the middle-class legacy in Brontë's novel. The Linton family produces no heir to carry on the family name, and Heathcliff's legitimate son is dead. However, Hareton is a type of son to Heathcliff, and it is through Hareton and his relationship to Heathcliff, that order and bloodlines

are restored in *Wuthering Heights*. In some ways, Hareton is Heathcliff most fully “realized”—and the orphan-Gypsy’s greatest legacy.¹⁰

Though Heathcliff remains animalistic and brutish throughout the novel, once Catherine dies and he has the run of the Heights and complete control over Hindley’s son, Heathcliff is actually able to assume the next phase of masculinity that defines the middle-class male—control over and participation within the domestic. Granted, this space is devoid of a wife and his legitimate son dies. These factors are important because his own muddled blood mixed with the certain blood of the Lintons is a disaster from the start. After Catherine and Isabella, he cannot be allowed to contaminate another woman. He comes close with Cathy Linton when she is forced into his home, turning her into a harsh, degraded character when he mandates that she live at the Heights. His intent to marry her to his legitimate son and corrupt the bloodline is unproductive, as Linton dies before the two conceive a child. The implication is that Linton is somehow reproductively abnormal. The fact remains, however, that Heathcliff has progressed significantly compared to other characters—and the proof is visible at the end of the novel in his legacy of influence.

It is because of Heathcliff that the Earnshaw name and heritage is restored. Though he may be an awkward or perverted version of a father to Hareton, he is a father to him nevertheless. Hareton explains before Heathcliff’s death that he “wouldn’t suffer a word to be uttered to him, in...disparagement” against his “father.” Upon hearing this, Cathy realizes that Hareton “took the master’s reputation home to himself: and was attached by ties stronger than reason could break – chains, forged by habit, which it would be cruel to attempt to loosen” (321).

¹⁰ Laura Peters argues that Hareton’s role in relation to Heathcliff’s is crucial to understand. “Hareton’s role,” she says, “is...[as] an orphan child who manages to retain an essentialised innocence in the face of the gypsy’s disruption of lineage and destruction of the family—like Heathcliff’s” (53).

When Heathcliff finally dies, Hareton “was the only one that really suffered much. He sat by the corpse all night, weeping in bitter earnest. He pressed its hand, and kissed the sarcastic, savage face that every one else shrank from contemplating; and bemoaned him with that strong grief which springs naturally from a generous heart, though it be tough as tempered steel” (335). Though Heathcliff’s own child could not be allowed to thrive—and even though he tainted all female orphans he came in contact with through his rough nature, sexuality, or itinerant desires—the male orphans, as indicated by Heathcliff and by Hareton most of all, can be allowed to survive.

Most importantly, Heathcliff restores the Earnshaw home to an Earnshaw. Hareton and Catherine will escape the taint of the Heights and live at the Grange, but their future is secured because both their homes and their class background have been stabilized. The family has not escaped unscathed. They cannot allow themselves to risk further contamination by remaining at its source, but they can overcome it and progress properly.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë presents readers with an overwhelming example of orphanhood as metaphor for middle-class survival. By allowing all inheritors in the novel to be orphaned, she places them in positions of extreme peril and mirrors the anxiety felt by the middle-class that someone unworthy could become its future—and, therefore, its downfall. Hindley and Heathcliff, especially, play out this concern in fascinating ways, presenting themselves as strange revisions of *Oliver Twist*. Though Hindley has all of the opportunities to succeed, at least in theory, Brontë insists that success cannot be bought because it must first be grounded in a strong tie to the home and a positive domestic influence. Heathcliff, on the other hand, mistakes his connection to the domestic at the Heights as being something positive. He carries that longing with him into the masculine world of business and succeeds, returning once

more to the Heights to stake his claim to what he considers to be his rightful inheritance. The problem is, of course, that each of these middle class men, who, in one form or another were successful away from the home, return to it—and the home was always corrupt, laying the foreground for their doom. Catherine, as a Nell allowed to survive and become a sexual being, causes the home to become even more corrupt, for her tainted sexuality and insistence upon separation, orphanhood, and itinerancy cause everyone in the novel to fail. Only through her death does anyone actually recover.

The Mill on the Floss: Dickens's and Brontë's Lineage Continues

Emily Brontë's Gothic reimagining of little Nell finds a new incarnation, albeit a subdued one, in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. Within this story, Eliot also tried to create a fate for Nell that is not doomed to failure. Building upon the central issues at play within both *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Wuthering Heights*, Eliot allows her female protagonist to have Catherine Earnshaw's early associations with Gypsiness and wanderlust, but denies Maggie Tulliver the problems that accompany orphanhood, for she allows the child to remain in an intact home well into her teen years. Maggie becomes a mixture of Nell, Catherine, and Isabella, but Eliot permits the child the freedom to make choices that are taken from the other three heroines. Namely, she gives Maggie an opportunity to reform herself into the perfect Victorian woman, in spite of her problematic associations with Gypsiness. Once Maggie's father dies, however, she finds that the one status that she cannot overcome is orphanhood. When the deadly combination of her association with Gypsies and her orphaned condition begins to shape her existence, Maggie's

fate is sealed, and she becomes another Catherine Earnshaw, who is capable of destroying the men and families around her.

Maggie Tulliver, a semi-autobiographical character of Eliot's, exhibits a love of wandering, an affinity for travel and adventure, and an independent and intelligent nature early in the novel; and these qualities are rarely criticized by the author during the course of the story.¹¹ Others may scold or berate Maggie for her wildness, but the reader is led to empathize with the child, seeing her as infinitely better than her brother and the rightful favorite of her father. Maggie also, though frequently impulsive, usually appears to be the most moral character in the novel. As the narrative of her life speeds along, however, and Maggie becomes an orphan, her morality is quickly compromised. Still, the reader is abruptly surprised by Eliot's decision to have Maggie and her brother die in the last few pages of the novel. In the end, Eliot's hopes of presenting an independent and intelligent grown-up version of little Nell cannot be realized. The question, therefore, becomes, simply, why?

In fact, the clues to Maggie's demise are embedded within the familial relationship this narrative shares with its predecessors. Maggie as Eliot's revised little Nell seems to be progressing well through childhood in spite of her associations with Gypsiness; but, just like Dickens and Brontë before, Eliot faces a crisis once Maggie becomes a sexual being. Maggie's advancement into adolescence becomes compromised when she is orphaned, and, once again, readers see that the female protagonist cannot overcome the lethal combination of Gypsiness and orphanhood.

¹¹ Many critics have pointed to the autobiographical aspects of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. For example, Emily Eells points out that *The Mill on the Floss* "depicts the first stage of [George Eliot's] literary career" and it is her "most autobiographical novel." Maggie, Eells points out, reads the same books that Eliot read as a child and appears to have the same personality.

Once Maggie becomes an orphan, her Gypsy nature can no longer be tempered. With no ties to the home, her need to stray from it begins to drive her actions, and, as she becomes more and more itinerant, she also begins to embody the threatening aspects of Gypsy sexuality that can potentially taint those around her. Her brother and potential suitors—all attempting to fulfill their roles as successful middle-class men—become infected by her interactions with them, and the novel's conflict resides in how each one successfully or unsuccessfully breaks free from her influence. Maggie's brother Tom is most at risk, for he shares her blood and upbringing (just as Hindley shared blood and a past with his sister Catherine), and, therefore, he must die along with Maggie. Both are products of a seemingly stable but corrupt home, and their genetic line must be diminished so that narrative and societal order can be restored. While Maggie's other suitors survive (just as also takes place in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Wuthering Heights*, where most men outlive Nell and Catherine, respectively), they do not escape unscathed. Eliot's crucial decision to make Maggie, the female child, the origin of Gypsiness creates special problems within the novel that can only be resolved through destruction.

A. Nell Tries Again: The Rise and Fall of Maggie Tulliver

Orphanhood in *The Mill on the Floss* functions symbolically through Maggie's status as the Gypsy-like outsider in the beginning of the novel, but she will become an orphan in fact during the final fourth of the narrative. Maggie's symbolic social and familial orphanhood appears from the beginning of the novel, as she rebels against typical models of proper Victorian domesticity. Maggie reads voraciously (not always tomes viewed as suitable for little girls), is fiercely independent, and has a tendency to speak her mind. Eliot's emphasis of Maggie's difference is important, for eventually the child does show that this difference can be overcome.

Eliot appears to be making the point throughout the narrative of Maggie's childhood and early experiences in adolescence that a female can rebel against the system and still be reformed and accepted later in life; society can change such a female and turn her into a productive and properly active middle-class citizen.

Maggie is not acting a part or rebelling to provoke a reaction—she was simply born a misfit (though as a softer version of a misfit than Catherine Earnshaw). The problem presented as Maggie matures centers around the unconscious differences (she simply behaves the way she does because that is who she is) illustrated in her early life that mutate into an insistence upon violating domestic norms for women as she grows older. She is Eliot's version of the female character who violates standards of female behavior, and though she certainly is not as unstable as Catherine Earnshaw, she is dangerous in her own way. As the novel develops, Eliot appears to be experimenting with ways to make Maggie into a successful middle-class woman without compromising her intelligence—something that would have been important to Eliot in her own life, as well.

Though there are some surface similarities between Catherine Earnshaw and Maggie Tulliver, Eliot, of course, does not attempt to write a gothic novel in *The Mill on the Floss*. She, however, is interacting with Dickens and Brontë in interesting ways, presenting revisions of characters and scenarios from the previous books and attempting to create alternate situations and outcomes with her own characters. In this story, readers experience yet another brother-sister pairing; only this time, it is the female child who is originally associated with Gypsiness both in her looks and her strange behavior, marking her as different from those around her—especially her family. Maggie's genetic inheritance is always suspect, the family believing her to be a “small mistake of nature,” a conversation unsurprising considering that this novel that is

concerned with race and survival was written shortly after Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* (16). Associated with what were considered during the nineteenth-century to be primitive peoples and racial others, Maggie's dark appearance and "brown skin as makes her look like a mulatter" (15) marks her as visibly different from others in her family, and Eliot further connects the child with the foreign in her "ke[eping of] a Fetish" (31) and associates her with witches and those of pagan faith as she "whirl[s] round like a Pythoness" (32).

But it is not simply Eliot's purpose to exoticize Maggie with various darker-skinned peoples of foreign lands; instead, she insists that Maggie's true racial alignment should be with Gypsies. Though Maggie is not a Gypsy in fact, Eliot seems to be building upon the folklore of Gypsy baby stealing and baby swapping.¹² Mrs. Tulliver cannot understand why she has been plagued with such a child, "'one gell, an' her so comical,'" who could not have possibly come from her womb, and often puzzles over how Maggie could turn out so dark and different from her family (15). But the first time readers see Maggie verbally associated with Gypsiness is after she has taken the drastic step of chopping off her hair. Rebelling against the women demanding that she brush her hair, look proper, and behave as a quiet little girl should, Maggie impulsively cuts her hair off, hoping to experience a moment of "triumph...over her mother and her aunts" (69). This decision prompts her Aunt Pullet to declare: "'She's more like a Gypsy nor ever...it's

¹² For more information about the mythology surrounding nineteenth-century representations about Gypsies kidnapping English children, see Jodie Matthews's "Back Where They Belong: Gypsies, Kidnapping and Assimilation in Victorian Children's Literature" (*Romani Studies*, 20:2, 2010). Matthews states, "Fictions about the adoption and conversion of Gypsy children are read not as texts that tell opposite stories about where Gypsy and non-Gypsy children should reside – with their own or adoptive parents – but as narratives that perform the same ostensible task: demonstrating the subject's proper place in a social order. ...[Gypsies] trouble the forms and meaning of 'family', an institution supposed to act as a pillar of Victorian society and its divisions. The compulsive repetition of familial disorder results in the powerful association between Gypsies and kidnapping, an arbitrary connection made to seem obvious and natural through ubiquity" (137).

very bad luck, sister, as the gell should be so brown—the boy’s fair enough. I doubt it’ll stand in her way i’ life, to be so brown.”” This simple statement, followed by Mrs. Tulliver’s reply that Maggie is a ““naughty child,”” goes beyond helpless scolding for actions and indicates that race and behavior have been combined as a unified negative aspect of Maggie’s behavior (73). Especially clear is Maggie’s ability to decide against the expected norm, to follow independent thoughts without considering the consequences imposed by society, a trait that aligns her with both Gypsies and orphans.

As much as the Dodson sisters annoy readers with their insistence upon propriety and social standing, their refusal to associate with Maggie does allow them to maintain a successful and even trajectory through the novel. However, just as Mr. Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* favors Heathcliff over Hindley, Mr. Tulliver chooses the Gypsy daughter over his male heir who is often remarked to be more like others in the family. Maggie and Tom are blood siblings, but Mr. Tulliver holds a special affection for Maggie and consistently stands up for the awkward child, ““tak[ing her] part”” (41). Though his affection for her does not kill him as it does Earnshaw, his close affiliation with Maggie marks his character. Like Maggie, Mr. Tulliver frequently makes poor decisions that, because he is an adult, have devastating consequences for his family. Dying in near moral and social degradation, his demise late in the novel is an important foreshadowing of Maggie’s death. In life, he destroys his social standing and fails to solidify his status as a middle-class male. One could argue that his failures indicate that his bad genetic line passed from himself to Maggie; and, perhaps that is Eliot’s reasoning. In retrospect, the apple does not fall far from the tree. However, his personality and actions end up affecting Maggie the most. Taking after her father, genetically and otherwise, taints her ability ever to

fulfill her moral function in the home. In effect, her genes and upbringing separate her from the home and family—both of which she either abhors or refuses to identify with at various times.

These feelings of separation manifest in more specific connections between Maggie and Gypsiness. Her full association with the Gypsies comes early in the novel's first book, when Maggie, angered over Tom's affection for their cousin Lucy, flees her aunt's home (the confines of the Dodson's and their expectations) and seeks to join the Gypsies, believing that the rumors she has heard are true—she is one of them. Eliot describes Maggie's decision to join the Gypsy group that she imagines lives on the common, stating:

[It] was by no means a new idea to Maggie: she had been so often told she was like a Gypsy, and "half wild," that when she was miserable it seemed to her the only way of escaping opprobrium, and being entirely in harmony with circumstances, would be to live in a little brown tent on the commons; the Gypsies, she considered, would gladly receive her and pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge.... Maggie thought her misery had reached a pitch at which Gypsydom was her refuge, and she rose from her seat on the roots of the tree with the sense that this was a great crisis in her life; she would run straight away till she came to Dunlow Common, where there would certainly be Gypsies; and cruel Tom, and the rest of her relations who found fault with her, should never see her any more. (112)

Of course, in many ways this is a child's fantasy: leave the world of enforced rules to join a community that seems to have no rules at all. The middle class, with all of its insistence upon prescribed behavior, appears to be the exact opposite of the Gypsy community that cannot even commit to permanent housing. For Maggie, however, there is a deeper allure in the decision to run off with the Gypsies; already marked as different because of her precociousness and looks, she believes that the Gypsies will value her in a way that her family cannot—that society cannot. Her reasons for running away are clear: she wants someone to "gladly receive her and pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge." In essence, she is the voice of Eliot in this moment (and of Brontë before her). Eliot, in her own life, had broken so many boundaries and

traveled away from her home, flitting from residence to residence in search of acceptance. Maggie's quest is personal for the author and for any woman who seeks to deviate from prescribed middle-class behavior norms.

Maggie's challenge to achieve acceptance is indicative of not only her struggle as a different type of female but also of any group in society that does not conform to middle-class norms. Nord considers Maggie's relationship to the Gypsies as a way for her to reconcile her (and Eliot's) "unconventional femininity" and explore what happens to "the alien or inexplicably aberrant member of a community that is otherwise homogenous, organic, and traditional" (99). Indeed, Maggie's feelings of separation from the "homogenous, organic, and traditional" middle-class community of St. Oggs are obvious and painful, but her decision to leave and join the Gypsies reveals more than a search for a "position of control" (Myers 134) or a place where her "unconventional femininity" (Nord 99) will be valued. The moment Maggie decides to leave her family should make the reader pause, for it is not a completely spontaneous decision but is instead a marker of a decided difference in Maggie's behavior, a choice that was not "a new idea to Maggie." Even she has carefully considered the depth of her association with the Gypsies; and, of even more significance, she also has come to the conclusion that joining the Gypsies and living in "a little brown tent" will content her, and she sees "Gypsydom [as] her refuge." More than anything else, this moment marks Maggie as aberrant. A combination of nature, music, and feeling leads to a longing for itinerancy—rather than a stable home—that Maggie sees as a "refuge." It is indeed a "great crisis in her life" at this moment—and one that will continue to haunt her for the remainder of the novel (Eliot 112).

Though Maggie discovers that Gypsy life rather frightens her, the experience alters her character forever. In her act of defiance—towards parental authority and society's

expectations—of breaking away and going out into the world alone, she enacts the most dangerous version of femininity imaginable to Victorians. Still, unlike Catherine Earnshaw, who embraces Gypsiness whole-heartedly and without reservation, Maggie Tulliver does have redeeming qualities. Similar to many of Eliot's heroines, Maggie is extremely bright and inquisitive, and far surpasses her brother's abilities. All of these traits, however, result in consequences just as devastating as Catherine's outrageous violence, placing Maggie in an abnormal position of being a scholar in a world where she should restrict her activities to painting and sewing.

The actual orphaning of the Tulliver children through Mr. Tulliver's injury and eventual death provides the culminating moment for them to either fail or succeed. Tom eventually does acquire accomplishments through hard work, which is a surprise to readers after Eliot's description of his behavior at school. Maggie on the other hand, though she tried to stop herself, sought "the favourite outdoor nooks about the home" and her books (297). Maggie's attempt to leave the home cannot be realized until her father dies, when she is an actual orphan and in a precarious position for an unmarried female in the nineteenth century. Reuniting with Philip Wakem, still poetic and dreamy in his adulthood and drawn in by Maggie's exotic beauty that he associates with great literature by Romantics and French writers (who often wrote about Gypsies), only cultivates "a more eager, inquiring look in her eyes" (345).

Maggie's encounter with Philip forces her to acknowledge her true nature. She attempted to be a predictable Victorian woman who functioned as the domestic angel while caring for her father, but her entrance into adolescence awakens all kinds of feelings within her. When Philip expresses his love for her, he feeds into her frustrations and presents a way out of the daily life that makes her feel trapped. Maggie fights middle-class expectations and traditions when Philip

appeals to her to engage herself to him. Maggie responds, “‘It has been very sweet, I know...[thinking that] I could tell you the thoughts that had come into my head while I was away from you. But it has made me restless – it has made me think a great deal about the world; and I have impatient thoughts again – I get weary of my home” (348). Maggie’s association with Philip, a boy who in many ways successfully navigates the waters of Victorian masculinity, has reignited her Gypsy lust for itinerancy and abandonment of the home and pure feminine virtue. She recognizes in him her potential future. Though it would be a future sanctioned by society, she cannot agree to it, because it violates the essence of her nature.

After her sexual and intellectual awakening at the hands of Philip, and along with the death of her father, Maggie embraces her Gypsiness and orphanhood unapologetically. She is “determined to be independent,” a fact that is restated several times, and appears to be moving from place to place quite a bit in the final stages of the novel (380). When Maggie fully gives in to her itinerancy and orphaned state, her otherness becomes an uncontrollable part of her being, and readers stand back in fascination as they witness Maggie unwittingly seduce her perfect and fair cousin Lucy’s fiancé, Stephen Guest, simply by using the Gypsy sexual allure that is now naturally presented by her.¹³ The situation frighteningly mimics the types of relationships

¹³ Nina Auerbach’s “The Power of Hunger: Demonism and Maggie Tulliver” addresses the incredible amount of sexual power Maggie holds, though she does so by equating *The Mill on the Floss* with a Gothic novel. She argues that the “intonations of Gothicism that run through the language of *The Mill on the Floss* converge in the...figure of Maggie, who broods over its landscape. The turbulent hair that is her bane as a child is an emblem of destructive powers she is only half aware of and unable to control.... The intensity with which she flings herself at the moment contains a certain murderousness.” (157) She specifically addresses Maggie’s effect on Stephen, saying, “Throughout the novel, Maggie’s potent power shines out at her eyes as the devil’s does.... [The] Medusa-like power of her eyes is referred to twice and is demonstrated in her bewitching effect on Philip and Stephen. ...Stephen...falls under Maggie’s spell and thirsts obsessively for her *look*” (165-166).

Catherine Earnshaw had with Edgar and Heathcliff. While in the presence of a middle-class man, Gypsy women have the ability to force middle-class men to deviate from their proper paths.

Before meeting Maggie, Stephen is perfectly content to move into a solid middle-class standing by marrying Lucy, a very proper and predictable Victorian female. As the narrator explains:

A man likes his wife to be accomplished, gentle, affectionate, and not stupid; and Lucy had all these qualifications. Stephen was not surprised to find himself in love with her, and was conscious of excellent judgment in preferring her [to other women].... [And] although Lucy was only the daughter of his father's subordinate partner...she was a little darling, and exactly the sort of woman he had always admired. (385)

Indeed, Stephen seems unmovable in his choice, but upon meeting Maggie, he is immediately distracted and becomes obsessed with having her for his own. Maggie's eyes, as they were when awakened by Philip, define her otherness. Though she "flash[es] a slightly defiant look" at Stephen and gives him a "direct glance," these are things that bewitch him and cause him to act unpredictably (392). His first impression of the "dark-eyed nymph" causes his emotions to rock out of balance, and before long he is making inappropriate advances towards her and behaving in wild and unpredictable ways (391).

Stephen goes so far as to enact a kidnapping scheme to force Maggie into marrying him, "to rush towards Maggie and claim her for himself", a plot straight out of a Gothic or Romantic novel and completely out of character for a man who had everything planned out perfectly (458). Maggie's presence ignites a dangerous sexual response within him and it seems as if he is acting under a suspicious influence when around her. Maggie's influence actually seems to force Stephen to forget his role as the active male, often making him the shy "mute" partner (347). Stephen becomes infected, as with a disease that makes him "dizzy with the conflict of passions—love, rage and confused despair; despair at his want of self-mastery, and despair that

he had offended Maggie” (461). When he takes Maggie out in the boat, away from all contact with those who might draw him from her spell, his only thought was “to deepen the hold he had on her,” as if her ability to slip away in the moment was a real possibility (479). Like Heathcliff, Stephen’s agency slips away as he realizes that “[l]ife hung on her consent,” a statement that indicates the very real risk to his survival (emotional and physical) that Maggie holds (487).

Though the experience of crossing the line from lust to kidnapping by trickery forces him to awaken from Maggie’s spell and face the censure of his community and peers, he is allowed to leave the community and the presence of Maggie for a time. This is an action that saves Stephen, returning him to conformity and his proper path (for, as noted, he and Lucy are together at the end of the novel). The example of their relationship is essential to understand, for it outlines the reasons Eliot makes the narrative choices that she does later in the novel with the two most significant men in Maggie’s life: Tom and Philip. As long as these men try to maintain a connection to her, they are doomed. While Philip will be redeemed through Maggie’s death (a forced disconnection between himself and her), readers come to see that Tom must die along with Maggie, for his connection is one of blood—and a bond that can never be severed successfully in a way that will allow him to move forward as a middle-class man.

B. Under the Spell of the Gypsy: Tom as a Failed Middle-Class Man

Though his sister fights against gender and middle-class norms, making herself into an outcast unconsciously in her childhood and purposefully in her adulthood, Tom Tulliver, even though he struggles in some areas, seems to represent that which is behaviorally normative in middle-class males. He seems to progress predictably through his childhood, experiencing all of Tosh’s developmental stages, living at home until school age and then leaving the home to study.

Tom, however, does present an example of the middle-class boy who can either turn out well or who could fail—just like *Oliver Twist*. When Tom attends lessons with his tutor, Mr. Stelling, the reader discovers that the teacher “very soon set down poor Tom as a thoroughly stupid lad” (146) who was prone to “obstinacy” and “indifference” and lacked the motivation to “appl[y]” himself” (146-147). Many boys of Tom’s age could be described in this manner, but Tom’s “indifference” to his future is alarming in a novel so concerned with the future of the Tulliver family. Additionally, his behavior soon reveals itself to be the natural product of the imperfect model he has in his father, who consistently makes poor choices and decisions in relation to his family.

Mr. Tulliver’s decision to provide Tom with education appears, on the surface a move that will lead to Tom’s advancement in the future. Tulliver, however, does not send his boy to a school; instead, Tom is a single student in a private home where he is the only older boy and he often falls toward helping Stelling’s wife with her own children—not at all the appropriate education for a middle-class boy who should be leaving the domestic. Tom should be in an all-male environment, learning to develop his masculinity, rather than being a domestic helper. Eliot intends readers to notice this fact, for she states that in spite of Stelling’s attempts to drill Latin into Tom’s head, “under this vigorous treatment Tom became more like a girl than he had ever been in his life before” (148). She repeats the sentiment, nearly word for word, a few paragraphs later, and emphasizes that rather than moving forward with his studies and maintaining an eye toward the future, Tom preferred to mind the Stelling’s infant children and the daughter Laura “was a sort of playfellow.” As the reader might interpret, Eliot soon tells us that Tom is attempting to recreate his own home complete with a new Maggie/sister, for “[i]n his secret heart, he yearned to have Maggie with him” (151). This longing for the Gypsy deviant sister

should be seen as an early warning sign of his future demise. Like Hindley and especially like Heathcliff, who we can also assume longed for Catherine (at least enough to return to her and fall under her spell once more), Tom cannot break free of his sister's influence. Not only does Tom suffer from his father's horrible decisions about where to place him but he also suffers from an unbreakable blood connection and long-lived personal history with his sister, the Gypsy who forever taints him.

Tom's longing for the Gypsy-like sister, the abnormal version of the fair Stelling children, forces him to remain joined with the domestic rather than breaking free from it. Even Tom seems to sense the danger of his situation, for when Maggie does come to see him, his insistence on marking their gender differences dominates their conversations for pages. In the end, however, he finally relents and "in the gladness of his heart at having dear old Maggie to dispute with and crow over again, seized her round the waist and began to jump with her round the large library table" (154). It is a moment of childish joy, of course, but the symbolic flaunting of their union as equals around the library table and books meant to help him reach his father's goal of Tom's becoming a man, "put to a business, as he may make a nest for himself an' not want to push me out o' mine," indicates that Tom's momentary abandonment of his studies in favor of the Gypsy Maggie's company. Tom's relief upon being reunited with Maggie, a child who always promises adventure and new experiences rather than tradition and predictability, shows that he is immature at best and corrupt at worst (19). Unlike Oliver, who willingly embarks on the path to becoming a gentleman, Tom seems to resist it. He appears to mirror the failed version of Oliver that is both like Hindley Earnshaw and Heathcliff.

Until this point, though there have been problems and abnormalities, the two Tulliver children have attempted to progress along a normal middle-class trajectory from childhood to

adolescence—and the emphasis has clearly been on Tom. Tom spent time in the domestic and entered formal schooling, even though the conditions were not ideal. Maggie remained in the home until late in childhood when, at some point, her parents sent her to an all girls' school, an experience readers discover little about. Returning home before this phase of their lives is complete indicates a severe disruption in a series of disruptions throughout their life. Maggie and Tom begin having disagreements and Maggie's personality, hardly demurred by her experience at Miss Firniss's school, "shoc[ks]" Tom who thinks "[s]he ought to have learned better than have those hectoring, assuming manners by this time" (216). Though the two have grown, neither can break free of the other, and Tom insists upon remaining emotionally involved with his sister—though he tries to portray himself otherwise—rather than going out into the world and choosing a wife to begin a new life with in adulthood.

Tom, however, does not seek out other women and he never expresses himself as a sexual male at any point in the novel—except when he is describing his association with Maggie. Like Heathcliff, he feels a need to regress rather than progress, and he wants to return to the childhood hold of the female Gypsy-orphan that has the power to contaminate him. His rage at Maggie's running away with Stephen seems driven by more than wounded familial pride. Like Heathcliff's impassioned speech to Catherine, Tom's words and sentences are broken compared to Maggie's own when he confronts her about her indiscretions—actions he sees as a personal betrayal against him. He loses all masculine control, and he "trembl[ed] and [went] white with disgust and indignation" as he spoke to her with "tremulous rage": "You will find no home with me.... You have disgraced us all—you have disgraced my father's name. You have been a curse to your best friends. You have been base—deceitful—no motives are strong enough to restrain you. I wash my hands of you for ever. You don't belong to me" (503). His next screed contains

more specific accusations of Maggie's promiscuity, accusing her of "“carrying on a clandestine relation with Stephen Guest...[and] using Philip Wakem as a screen to deceive Lucy.” As he did when he was a child, Tom reverts back to his standard claims of superiority over Maggie, telling her peevishly, “You have struggled with your feelings, you say. Yes! *I* have had feelings to struggle with—but I conquered them. I have had a harder life than you have had; but I have found my comfort in doing my *duty*” (504). Tom aligns “duty” with staying close to the home, refusing to move forward but also living in the past. His anger with Maggie for not doing the same, for not remaining with him as his little sister-helper forever, enrages him—as does her affection for any male other than himself. Tom is stuck. He depends on Maggie rejoining him in the vision of his childhood where he was dependent upon her even then, and his “repulsion towards [her now]...derived its very intensity from their early childish love in the time when they had clasped tiny fingers together, and their later sense of nearness in a common duty and a common sorrow” (520).

C. No Hope for Recovery: The Death of Maggie and Tom

The flood that engulfs Maggie and Tom at the end of the novel reinforces the idea that these two siblings have been doomed from the start and that their demise is inevitable.¹⁴ Tom, due to his unnatural obsession with his relationship towards his sister and his inability to successfully progress in the middle-class world, must die along with Maggie, who, even at this stage in the novel, is so associated with a corrupt version of Gypsiness and orphanhood that she

¹⁴ Particularly in the case of Tom Tulliver, Eliot condemns her character all along. As Susan Fraiman discusses in her exploration of *The Mill on the Floss* as a Bildungsroman, “[U]nlike Dickens’s social-climbing Pip, Tom never manages to reframe his great expectations, does not reroute his course in time for a chance at romantic consummation, and he reaches a moral turning point only moments before his death. By killing Tom instead of wedding him, Eliot’s text refuses, narratively, to validate his formation and to invest it with significant content” (140).

asks as she floats along, ““O God, where am I? Which is the way home?”” (538) Her panic reiterates her separation from the home and her orphaned state.

Though Meyer claims that the “novel's closure is less powerful than the nostalgic yearning that pervades it,” this is clearly not the case if one takes into account the result as the natural conclusion to Eliot’s argument that centers around Gypsiness and orphanhood (131). Maggie’s demise is a given consequence, even though it is clear that she represents Eliot at her most autobiographical. Still, Tom must also perish because he has allowed himself to remain contaminated by his sister. Even in death, “brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted—living through again in one supreme moment, the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roam the daisied fields together” (542). Tom and Maggie have been allowed to return to their “roam[ing]” state, but it is a regression that is unhealthy.

In the end, Eliot stresses that there is redemption and the opportunity for recovery—but only for those who look ahead. “To the eyes that have dwelt on the past,” she tells us, “there is no thorough repair.” Though “Nature repairs her ravages—repairs them with her sunshine, and with human labour,” Eliot insists that the only way “repair” is possible in this story is for the Tullivers’s genetic line to be erased. Those not directly related to Maggie and Tom, but who had intimate contact with them, become like the “uptorn trees [that] are not rooted again” and “the parted hills [that] are left scarred.” These people are forever changed, and even their suitability for endurance is questioned by Eliot, for she says of these people who are like the trees and the hills, “[I]f there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of the past rending.” Eliot’s insistence on the visible flaw of Maggie’s influence comes across at this late moment in the novel. Overcoming that flaw is possible, she insists, but only for those who are strongly enough connected to the middle-class

goal of putting survival first. Stephen, though it was “years after” the flood, is married with “a sweet face beside him” (presumably Lucy) (543). But for Philip, he, like Heathcliff, will bear the “marks” of his association with Maggie forever. He “was always solitary. His great companionship was among the trees of the Red Deeps, where the buried joy seemed still to hover - like a revisiting spirit” (543-544). It is interesting that Eliot resorts to an implication that Maggie’s spirit, like Catherine’s, haunts her new version of Heathcliff in Philip, for, like Heathcliff, Philip will remain without blood progeny because he cannot break free of the Gypsy’s hold.

The ending of *The Mill on the Floss* is fast and not meant to evoke a sentimental response. Instead, it is an almost Gothic conclusion to what seems to be a very common example of Eliot’s realistic novels. Maggie’s refusal to create and maintain ties with feminine domesticity does not just portray her as a misunderstood outsider; instead, the real horror of her character results from her ability to corrupt her family from within in a way that leads to fatal consequences—especially for her immediate family. Her adult association with seductive Gypsiness and her insistence upon living out a willful and accepted state of orphanhood, proves to be devastating because, for the first time, her corruption extends beyond herself to various males in the middle-class world. In this novel, because she is the vessel of Gypsiness and the origin of the contaminant, and because her brother can never break free of her influence, Maggie and her brother must die. What begins as an attempt to create a positive outcome for a new Nell and Catherine turns into the same old story. In fact, it is less optimistic than the seemingly dark *Wuthering Heights*. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot rips apart Brontë’s hopeful vision of restored lineage.

Eliot provides a rendering of what would have happened had Heathcliff and Catherine been allowed to reunite. Because she allows this fate to live itself out on the page, however briefly, Eliot cannot allow a second generation to come along. She knows that even allowing either of the Tulliver children the opportunity to procreate is too risky. In some ways, she more fully backs up Dickens's point about little Nell and Sally Brass than Brontë does.

As Nord explains, "For Eliot, the phenomenon of disinheritance is always linked not only to relations between child and parents and to fortune or property, but also—and more important—to the individual's vexed relation to community and often to race or nation" (101-102). Though many writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and beyond) viewed the Gypsy through Romantic eyes, the use of Gypsiness combined with orphanhood as tropes to discuss the survival of the middle class—specifically middle-class females who break social norms—is not at all beautiful or sublime. Instead, as shown in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mill on the Floss*, the female characters who embody the mixed tropes of Gypsiness and orphanhood make a broader statement about the risks middle-class society takes if domesticity is not cultivated and enforced early on among female children—and if male children do not progress normally in life. And, these statements almost always relate back to Nord's idea about the "phenomenon of disinheritance" and the fears that that produces among the middle-class readers of these novels.

“HARDY, BRAVE, AND STRONG”: ENGLAND AND ORPHANS IN

A CHILD’S HISTORY OF ENGLAND AND BLEAK HOUSE

Instability, wandering, and itinerancy continue to develop as themes in mid-century novels by Dickens. Though, like Brontë and Eliot, Dickens was originally concerned with how middle-class individuals (particularly women) were affected by these states, by the 1850s he noticeably changes his focus to examine how these issues affect England as a whole. Just as he sought to provide Oliver and Nell with stable homes and predictable values, in his mid-century novels Dickens seeks the same outcome for not only individual characters but also for England as a nation.

Whereas in *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* Dickens’s characters struggled to define themselves as middle-class citizens in a world that often worked against them and operated according to values in opposition to those held by the middle class, by the 1850s Dickens no longer had to worry about people learning how to become middle-class citizens, because by this time society already largely was run and controlled by them. The power of their dominance and right to rule was no longer a question up for debate. The aristocracy was losing its hold on politics and power, and Queen Victoria, though still influential, chose to stay close to home and became a figurehead iconic of middle-class domestic queenliness.

The acknowledgment of middle-class dominance in mid-nineteenth century England can be seen in an 1848 *Examiner* article. The author rails against Benjamin Disraeli’s association with the aristocracy, explaining why the middle class should be and is in control:

Why has the middle class become predominant? The question is not difficult to answer. Is it not to be ascribed to the growing wealth of a vastly increased number

of the population, accompanied by a high tone of morality and great mental activity? It is these conditions alone that should give power. Power is alone safe in the hands of this class. Their prosperity is essential to the well-being of the whole community....

The middle class are the creators and the distributors of the wealth, and to object to the influence which they exercise, and which must inevitably increase, exhibits a contracted view of the high functions belonging to their position. They have sprung into existence out of the growing prosperity of the country. They are the natural result of the progressive strides of civilization, and the circumstances which gave them birth are continually adding to their importance. This cannot possibly be fraught with evil. They can enact no laws which will be to their exclusive advantage. Every advancing step on their part is necessarily the diffusion of knowledge, and the more equal distribution of wealth. ("Mr. Disraeli on the Middle Classes" 475)

The author's emphasis on "morality" and the middle class's superior vision and ability is clear.

Also transparent is the author's belief that all of England should follow the middle-class example of leadership, which has come into existence naturally and "inevitably" due to "progressive strides of civilization." The quickly increasing influence of the class was, according to this author, a very good thing; but by the 1850s Dickens was worried about sustaining this power and sense of "progress."

The middle class's increased influence and stability in England led to Dickens changing his use of the orphan, this time using the orphan not as a symbol of how to achieve individual progress but instead as an example of why care should be taken to maintain stability and ensure that the class continued along a proper progressive trajectory. When orphans appear as characters in these mid-century novels, they now symbolize the nation, functioning as models for action and behavior. Progress as a theme in these works is less about an individual's cultivation of discipline and dedication to attaining authenticity and morality. Instead, Dickens is more concerned about how England will become a capable, authentic, and moral nation. Teaching the nation to survive by emphasizing the need for all classes—upper and lower—to evolve into the middle class becomes Dickens's new goal, and in his mid-century work he creates England as its

own character, first presenting it as a struggling orphan in *A Child's History of England* and then as a suffering entity in a world littered with orphans trying to survive in an inauthentic and immoral England in *Bleak House*.

In *A Child's History of England*, Dickens revisits the concerns he built upon in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, recasting Oliver/Nell as a morally orphaned nation figure that is suffering at the hands of rulers who act out of self-interest rather than upon middle-class values. England becomes a single entity that represents “the people,” a unisex orphaned character struggling to find stability in a nation run by disingenuous rulers. England, presented as a genderless and single-class entity throughout much of the history, continues to be portrayed as moral even in the face of adversity, much like Oliver and Nell. Unlike Oliver and Nell, however, “the people” of England remain dependent upon its rulers, most of whom Dickens despises. The vile and fluctuating nature of the power hungry monarchy and government constantly threatens the stability of the masses—the core of what is always referred to as England. The one ruler who does show strength and admirable character traits in the *Child's History* does so because she behaves according to middle-class standards, but, like Nell, she fails to survive and mold the country successfully, because those in charge will not adopt her value system. Dickens's portrayal of a single model monarch—Lady Jane Grey—makes clear that middle-class values are essential if the nation's people are to thrive. Jane, of course, dies before she can rule, much like Nell dies before she can establish domestic queenliness, because the corrupt system in England refuses to see that Jane is a legitimate heir and monarch. Jane's struggle and failure to survive her reign is a mirror of the fate Dickens fears for the middle class. Though it rose to power quickly, just like Jane, it also could fall if the rest of society—upper and lower classes, as well as England itself—does not conform to its standards. In the *Child's History*, time and again, those

who wish to live by the virtues Dickens lauds in his other novels end up dead or forced into silence by the inauthentic people in charge (usually royalty or the aristocracy). By the end of the *Child's History*, readers are left wondering what the fate of England will be as it wanders throughout time without proper guidance. Along the way, however, Dickens does provide suggestions for how the country should be run.

In *Bleak House*, written at the same time as the *Child's History*, Dickens refines his message that England's rulers and government should adopt middle-class morality and virtues of authenticity in order to make the country strong. The novel, however, presents a world in which the middle classes are in charge. The aristocracy is nearly obsolete in the plot and there are only scant references to the monarchy. Instead, Dickens points out that, even though power has shifted and rightly belongs to the middle class, those in charge are becoming corrupted by power in much the same way as most of the rulers in the *Child's History*. The restoration of stability to England—indeed, its very survival as a thriving country—rests upon the middle class securing its values and in its approach to ruling the country. By the end, Dickens once again makes clear that this can only be done by joining successful versions of Oliver and Nell together, allowing for a new future and population of “the people.”

A Child's History of England: The Nation as an Orphaned Protagonist

It is no accident that *A Child's History of England* appeared in 1851, not long before Dickens began work on a novel (*Bleak House*) that examined England as a country and its people as a whole. In the history, Dickens presents the history of England as an entity (also referred to as “the people,” a group which Dickens depicts as embodying the values of the nineteenth-century middle class) engaged in constant struggle with rulers who did not embody middle-class

authenticity and morality. The people of England have been powerless against the authority of its monarchs and ruling upper class for most of the country's history, a scenario in opposition, in some ways, with that of the situation at hand in 1850s England, a time in which the middle classes held much control. It is an intriguing addition to the Dickensian collection, and many wonder why he bothered writing it. Viewed in relation to his other books, however, the history comes to function as not only a portrayal of the past but also a warning for the future—of what could happen to England should the middle class not maintain control over its newly won power and influence in the nation.

In the history, Dickens casts England as a unisex orphaned figure that embodies the early struggles for survival Oliver Twist confronted in the beginning of his own story and the conflicts presented by the states of instability and itinerancy that threaten Nell. The *Child's History* sets the stage as an experimental playground for Dickens's new approach of presenting the orphan, for by examining the faults and glories of different monarchs, Dickens can comment not only about individual people but also about the country as well. He also never abandons his continued use of the orphan metaphor, only now it embodies not simply a middle-class child but an entire country. England is never referred to as "he" or "she," but Dickens does make clear at various points that "England" is a term interchangeable with "the people." Dickens presents the country (and the people) as an orphan struggling to survive in a world that is either indifferent to it or consumed by immoral and inauthentic behavior that threatens to kill it. England as an orphan figure, a new Oliver Twist or little Nell existing in a universe of much higher stakes that affect everyone, must navigate itself out of the corruption caused by horridly inauthentic monarchs and systems of government before it emerges semi-successfully—though Dickens also leaves the future up for question at the end. In the beginning, England is unrecognizable and unformed,

much like the early Oliver, and it exists alone and at the mercy of various temporary caretakers and rulers. As time progresses and a structured ruling body appears in England, the reader is constantly reminded of the country's tenuous position, always subject to fluctuating powers and influences.

Like Oliver and Nell, England remains at the mercy of whoever is in charge. The country's lack of stability, according to Dickens's vicious portrayal of the problem, comes from the fact that its leaders lack authenticity. As the history progresses, England begins to mirror a wanderer through time, much like Nell, and its future is left up to question at the end. Within the history, however, Dickens constantly makes a clear distinction between the corrupt governing forces that have so often brought England low and those characters who embody values that the middle class holds dear. At no other point in the *Child's History* does this become more obvious than in Dickens's concentrated portrayal of the infamous Tudor family spawned by Henry VIII, a character notoriously linked with the dangerous and corruptive Quilp from *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In the end, the character of England is the only one that suffers as it floats passively through corrupt reign after reign.

Literary scholars often ignore the *Child's History*, likely because they simply see it as a biased and flawed account of England's past. But Dickens's version of history is important precisely for that reason. Unlike most biographers or scholars who mention the history in passing or not at all, Peter Ackroyd, author of the esteemed biography *Dickens*, devotes an entire two pages to the book. Ackroyd admits that the *Child's History*, originally unintended for an audience but eventually published serially in *Household Words*, "has very much the timbre of the mid-nineteenth century," and that it is a "melodramatic and theatrical account" of history. Ackroyd contends, "It is often said that historical writing, like biography, says more about the

period in which it is written than about the period which is its ostensible subject; in a sense, Dickens's own attempt proves this" (585-584). The *Child's History* is indeed "very sharp and very opinionated," but Ackroyd also points out that Dickens thought of it as "'true'...and not 'genteel.'" Dickens's own phrasing of his intent in writing this history—to present the "tru[th]"—shows his wish to illuminate the story of his homeland in authentic terms and to avoid what Ackroyd calls "polite history" (584). Ackroyd goes on to say, "There is nothing polite about Dickens's own account of England's past and, from a reading of the volume, you would think the history of that country to be no more than a continuing 'battle of life'; a frenzied, active, heaving controversy which ends in the death of a monarch, only to begin all over again" (584). Indeed, Ackroyd's assessment is true, for Dickens appears to subject his readers to one excoriation after another of each monarch discussed.

Ackroyd allows the history an important place within the Dickensian canon, however. He notes the similarities between it and Dickens's historical novels, but he also shows a connection between this often forgotten book and Dickens's view of the English people. As Ackroyd explains, the history as it is written displays the "permanent and unassuageable English character," even going so far as to say, "No clearer statement [as that found about the English character in *A Child's History of England*] of his beliefs exist, and it ought always be kept in mind [in Dickens's later novels]" (585). In spite of the statement Ackroyd is making about the importance of the *Child's History*, there is another crucial comment being made in this section of his biography. Ackroyd's belief in this history as a foundational text in Dickensian studies allows readers to see a shift in Dickens's focus from the earlier novels.

The *Child's History* serves as an experimental playground for his new agenda, because by examining the faults and glories of different monarchs, Dickens can comment not only about

individual people but also about the country as well. He also never abandons his continued use of the orphan metaphor, only now it embodies not simply a middle-class child but also an entire country. Especially in the *Child's History*, Dickens presents from the beginning England as an orphan struggling to survive in a world that is either indifferent to it or consumed by immoral and inauthentic behavior that threatens to kill it. His concentration upon those real people he views as bad and good align perfectly with how he has presented his literary characters thus far, and it is by paying attention to these portrayals that we can see a link between this work and his later novels.

The arising tension between the two aspects of England—its rulers and its people—comes into sharp focus when one looks at the *Child's History* as a whole. The question arises, “What is England?” The reader, however, comes to see that, while other historians may have presented England’s story in terms of its monarchical history, for Dickens England is the people and the land—their narrative of survival and maintaining a constant identity even while under unsuitable and instable rulers and governments. As Rosemary Jann points out in one of the few existing essays about the *Child's History*, Dickens was constantly presenting two time periods at odds with one another but strangely linked. The *Child's History*, she explains, is one with an underlying subtext that glorifies the “fortitude of the English race” (200). Though Dickens essentially subjects his readers to a “roll call of criminal kings with a few generalized celebrations of their bravery,” Jann argues that underneath it all is a commentary that urges readers to reject the romanticized version of English history and praise those—i.e. essentially the common English citizen—for having the strength to endure centuries of the “incompetence of English monarchs, the chicanery of popish clergy, and the violence, brutality, and injustice of yesteryear” (199). The pitting of the inauthentic past of England as represented by monarchs and

the new authentic and moral future of England as seen in the portrayal of the land itself and its common people is a fascinating drama to watch play out on the pages of the *Child's History*.

Always in the background of the book, though never as strongly portrayed as it is in the opening, is the description of England's survival—and, by default, the Englishman's survival. "Dickens used the *Child's History* to provide a variety of antidotes to nostalgic idealization of the past," Jann explains. "He showed the 'rusty side of glory's blade' by his constant emphasis on the savagery, violence, and waste of life it entailed, but also by a calculated attempt to restore the dimension of class to the deceptively uniform social contours of the past" (200). Class emerges as a definitely overpowering, though understated on the page, contender in the *Child's History*. Though Jann sees the excoriation of monarchs and the aristocracy as important, she limits its significance, pointing out that the common man has continually been subjected to the wrongs of those in power.

Jann's argument has merit, but perhaps Dickens's statements about class are even more specific. The *Child's History* is invested in class issues, but it is primarily interested in promoting a specifically middle-class value system as the model for English survival and success. England presented as an orphaned land struggling to survive through countless journeys in its history resembles so many other characters found in Dickens's early fiction, and during the next several years it will be England functioning as a character that interests Dickens most.

Like the beginning of *Oliver Twist* and in phrasing mimicked in later novels, Dickens opens *A Child's History of England* by describing the country in its untouched and primitive state, creating a point of origin and a traceable history from a blank slate to the present. He opens the history by stating:

[At the beginning of time] these Islands [of Great Britain] were in the same place, and the stormy sea roared round them, just as it roars now. But the sea was not

alive, then, with great ships and brave sailors, sailing to and from all parts of the world. It was very lonely. The Islands lay solitary, in the great expanse of water. The foaming waves dashed against their cliffs, and the bleak winds blew over their forests; but the winds and waves brought no adventurers to land upon the Islands, and the savage Islanders knew nothing of the rest of the world, and the rest of the world knew nothing of them. (1)

The passage is interesting in its placement of the sea against the “lonely” and isolated land of England that is cut off from the rest of the world. The sea likely represents outside forces continually trying to break down the island, yet England remained stoic as it “lay solitary, in the great expanse of water,” strong and unyielding against the “dash[ing] waves” and “bleak winds.” The elements threatening the island’s basic survival, and the passage’s emphasis on the primitive conditions of a country that would become great, remind readers of the opening of *Oliver Twist*, in which “Oliver and Nature fought out the point [of survival] between them” (1-2). The lone orphaned Oliver battles against the elements and struggles to survive, all the while steadily progressing towards his future status. But this solitary island is also peopled with early versions of Englishmen and Englishwomen, characters who, though they usually remain nameless and in the background, are equated with England the country. These early islanders struggled to endure in a “country...covered with forests, and swamps...[with] no roads, no bridges, no streets, no houses that you would think deserving of the name” (2). Just as in so many of his novels before, domesticity as the ideal and homelessness (or improper options for homes) have been the biggest obstacle for orphans in their progress and survival in the world. In the *Child’s History*, the people and the land try to survive, wandering throughout history as pawns suffering at the whim of those few powerful people in control. By the time the history ends, of course, it is the nineteenth century, and, for the most part, the people have taken the power from the nobility. Though in the beginning the common Englishman may not be in control or powerful, Dickens, in his praise of

them at various points, reminds us that these anonymous people are the forebears of many of the current members of the powerful middle class.

The *Child's History* functions as another Dickensian novel, elevating the “villains and victims” Jann mentions but also highlighting the good personalities contributing to the country’s historical narrative (204). In *A Child's History of England*, especially, readers see England faltering under immoral and inauthentic rulers—rulers who are themselves human figures symbolic of England. The future of the country is implicit in the question continually hovering in the background: will England survive yet another horrible ruler? Most of England’s monarchs are detestable figures in Dickens’s eyes, men and women prone to deception and political intrigue as long as they benefit personally. Dickens has no tolerance for them, and he says, “To forgive these unworthy princes was only to afford them breathing-time for new faithlessness. They were so false, disloyal, and dishonourable, that they were no more to be trusted than common thieves” (95). Indeed, each new chapter brings on more accusations and criticism. Frequently, readers discover stories of brutal and disingenuous kings, but the motivations behind their foul deeds are what angers Dickens the most.

In his screed against England’s past rulers, Dickens focuses his criticisms around how these monarchs violated Victorian middle-class values. Highlighting the rulers who are unfocused, who defy Victorian middle-class gender roles, and who behave inauthentically, Dickens attempts to teach his audience that the middle class must not only rule themselves through commitment to their class value system, properly enacted gender roles, and authenticity, but they must also make sure that England is ruled by those values as well. The fate of England, struggling against the chaos of the world and those corrupt forces constantly threatening it, depends upon not only middle-class survival but also enforcement of middle-class values.

Dickens makes clear that the middle class must focus its efforts and reform England into a nation committed to certain class-based standards by showing the downfall of unfocused rulers. For example, Dickens's criticism of William the Conqueror resides less in his propensity for violence than it does in his leading "a restless life" endowed with greed. Dickens also rails against those who violate established Victorian middle-class gender roles. For example, when speaking of Richard the Lionhearted, Dickens tears apart any romanticized account of his life, stating, "Richard was said in after years, by way of flattery, to have the heart of a Lion. It would have been far better, I think, to have had the heart of a Man. His heart, whatever it was...had been a black and perjured heart, in all its dealings with the deceased King, and more deficient in a single touch of tenderness than any wild beast's in the forest" (97). The criticism of Richard the Lionhearted is that he is not a "Man" in Dickens's eyes, for he had no compassion or morality. In other words, the "Lionhearted" king was no better than a "beas[t] in the forest." James I is also described as being decidedly non-English, first of all because he is from Scotland and secondly because he appears to be a mutation into something so hideous that he could not represent the English people.

James I is "ugly, awkward, and shuffling both in mind and person," and Dickens continues to defame the king in other ways, saying, "His tongue was much too large for his mouth, his legs were much too weak for his body, and his dull goggle-eyes stared and rolled like an idiot's. He was cunning, covetous, wasteful, idle, drunken, greedy, dirty, cowardly, a great swearer, and the most conceited man on earth." The attack on James and other monarchs align them with the grossly caricatured and deformed villains who populate Dickens's other novels. James I is a particularly good example of this continuing trend, for his horrid physical characteristics match up perfectly with his despicable personality. Dickens continues to malign

James, vilifying him for not having the strength of middle-class men, for he is “the worst rider ever seen,” and explaining how he violates all codes of conduct (especially those outlined by Cardinal Newman) due to his high opinion of himself. “He was one of the most impertinent talkers (in the broadest Scotch) ever heard,” Dickens explains, “and [he] boasted of being unanswerable in all manner of argument” (324).

Of course, gentlemanliness as a virtue closely coincides with authenticity, and it is a ruler’s lack of authenticity that bothers Dickens the most. He especially despises the inauthenticity exhibited by the seventeenth-century king Charles II. Dickens says that this monarch had a “swarthy, ill-looking face and great nose,” encouraged “profligate times in England,” and was simply to be dubbed “The Merry Monarch.” The word “merry” is not to be taken as positive, of course, for Dickens constantly prefixes that word before any reference to Charles, and says, “Let me try to give you a general idea of some of the merry things that were done, in the merry days when this merry gentleman sat upon his merry throne, in merry England” (388). The concept of “merr[iness]” indicates inauthenticity, as it is a frivolous state of inaction that ignores truth. That the king is “merry” and that everything he did was “merry,” leads to “merry days,” “merry gentlemen,” and, even worse, a “merry England.” In other words, active leadership counts, and with immoral and inauthentic leadership, the most important protagonist of all—England—could fall.

Though he exposes each monarch to his critical gaze, Dickens especially enjoys discussing the Tudor dynasty. Dickens’s vitriol against the monarchy is constant for the most part, but he especially makes their cruelty and wrongdoings apparent in his portrayal of King Henry VIII’s family and lineage. His interest is appropriate considering that rarely in English history has more emphasis been placed upon inheritance and the future of a dynasty. Because of

his obsession with orphans and the future of the middle-class, it makes perfect sense for Dickens to concentrate so fully upon Henry's family situation. In his portrayal of the Tudors, he resurrects familiar images and presents similar stories—especially those from *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Only this time around, metaphorical characters are presented as more than symbolic representation. Henry is a real Quilp of the past, threatening the survival and success of his family and country. His children, some sickly and unable to survive and others who bear the burden of genetic connection with him, become frightening mutations of what England could become. Only one figure stands as a savior among them: Jane Grey. It is inevitable, however, that, like Nell, she must sacrifice herself to prevent further corruption.

Dickens proclaims Henry VIII (perhaps correctly) to be “one of the most detestable villains that ever drew breath,” a “big, burly, noisy, small-eyed, large-faced, double-chinned, swinish-looking fellow in later life” who “was anxious to make himself popular” (253). Henry appears to be one of the most inauthentic—and, of course, immoral—of the monarchs reviewed. Dickens makes a special point of bringing up Henry's lack of authenticity, saying that the man (and the abhorred Cardinal Wolsey who was so closely associated with him) was “fond of pomp and glitter” and that he “[found] artful excuses and pretenses for almost any wrong thing,...arguing that black was white, or any other colour” (257).

His readers should already have been well aware of Dickens's hatred of Henry VIII from their earlier experience of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, a novel in which Dickens compares the loathsome and inauthentic Quilp to the detested ruler. The key point of interest appears to be both Henry's and Quilp's mockery of the home and the institution of marriage, for like Henry, Quilp looks to contaminate the women and future generations around him. In fact, Henry VIII's immoral legacy recasts itself in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Quilp, who lives in the Tower of

London's shadow, tells Nell that she will be "Mrs Quilp the second, when Mrs Quilp the first is dead." Quilp "lur[es Nell] towards him...to be [his] wife, [his] little cherry-cheeked, red-lipped wife... just the proper age for [him]," just as Henry chose younger and younger wives as his reign went on—many of whom died as a result of their association with him. Dickens automatically associates Nell with these dead women, making clear that her goodness and future is further threatened when Quilp reveals that Nell will "come to be Mrs Quilp of Tower Hill"—in other words, a dead queen, killed by his corrupt nature and defiled by his lecherous sexualization of her (53). For Dickens, there is no worse king than Henry, so it is natural that Quilp be compared to such a creature. It is also natural, then, that Dickens reprises all of his earlier novelistic disdain for England's most infamously profligate king in his later *Child's History*.

The vile Henry's influence still haunts England after his death. Once his cruel reign ends, his son Edward comes to the throne, and, in many ways, he is as harsh as his father. Edward, however, is unable to come to an authentic knowledge of himself. As an easily manipulated toy of ambitious men, Edward appears destined for failure all along. The boy king dies young, the natural result of being the progeny of a man like Henry who should not have been allowed to procreate¹. By age sixteen, when, according to middle-class standards, he should have been well into the second stage of securing his masculinity by cutting all ties to the home and surrounding himself with only men, "Edward was now sinking in a rapid decline." Dickens makes a special point to note that the ailing boy king was "handed...over to a woman-doctor who pretended to be able to cure [him...but h]e speedily got worse" (284). Because he has not secured a proper

¹ The emphasis on Edward's destiny to die young mimics the emphasis on proper reproduction in novels like *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Mill on the Floss*, in which characters born of the most corrupt unions (the Marchioness, Linton, and Tom, among others, are good examples) cannot be allowed to live or procreate.

state of manhood and has not married and legitimately sired a child, the Tudor dynasty threatens to die with him. But Henry's evil influence continues to menace England.

Of Mary, Henry's next child to take the throne, Dickens says that she earned the title "Bloody Queen Mary," and that "she will ever be justly remembered with horror and detestation in Great Britain." Mary, also a fanatically religious woman, is the iniquitous result of a man like Henry VIII (or Quilp), who does not have the power to produce anything good or profitable to England's people but who instead has only "[t]he stake and the fire [as] the fruits of [her] reign" (297). As so many corrupt heroines in previous Dickens novels, she fails to produce an heir or have an ideal marriage, and the throne passes to yet another of Henry VIII's children: Elizabeth I.

The effect of corrupt Tudor blood is revealed in Dickens's demystification of Elizabeth I. Though he does give her credit for "[m]any improvements and luxuries [being] introduced" during her reign, he laments the fact that she tended towards exhibiting masculinity—a corruptive trait he believes Elizabeth necessarily carried due to her being Henry VIII's child. Though Dickens constantly states in this section that he will give a true picture of Elizabeth, he seems reluctant to lavish any praise on her. Each laudatory comment is followed by a backhanded criticism. For example, Dickens says, "She was well educated, but a roundabout writer, and rather a hard swearer and coarse talker. She was clever, but cunning and deceitful, and inherited much of her father's violent temper" (298). In the end, Dickens cannot get away from Elizabeth's connections to Henry VIII, stating:

The Queen was very popular, and in her progresses, or journeys about her dominions, was everywhere received with the liveliest joy. I think the truth is, that she was not half so good as she has been made out, and not half so bad as she has been made out. She had her fine qualities, but she was coarse, capricious, and treacherous, and had all the faults of an excessively vain young woman long after she was an old one. On the whole, she had a great deal too much of her father in

her, to please me. (323)

Considering Quilp's and Henry VIII's ties in the Dickensian canon, one cannot help but see that Dickens's efforts to describe Henry's offspring are exactly what he hoped to avoid when he allowed Nell to escape Quilp's clutches. Mary and Elizabeth are not the Marchioness, for there is no possibility that their outcomes could be tempered by unions with authentic men or creations of authentic households. Instead, these two women are necessarily doomed. Even though Elizabeth brought credit to England, Dickens cannot get away from the genetic ties she shares with her father, as he says at the end of the passage, and in some ways she can be seen as a toned down version of Sally Brass, a woman embracing masculine business and becoming all the more sexually dangerous for doing so. Elizabeth, of course, dies without children, and the direct Tudor lineage and reign is brought to an end, much as corrupt legacies have died out in previous books by Dickens.

In the middle of the dwindling Tudor line, however, is Dickens's closest portrayal of a heroine: Lady Jane Grey. Though she is never acknowledged as a queen in fact, Jane, as presented by Dickens, embodies all positive feminine middle-class virtues and holds the potential for a better future for England. As pure English emblems of virtue, the women Dickens upholds as models in the *Child's History* should be noticed. For example, though other women are occasionally marked for their good morals or efforts of encouraging authenticity among their husbands or kings, Jane rises above the pitfalls of the corrupt system even though it forces her into her death. Lady Jane Grey, uncompromising in her values and beliefs no matter what the cost, emerges as the model of morality and authenticity in the *Child's History*. She is a shadow version of *The Old Curiosity Shop's* Nell, whose death also functions symbolically as a valiant and heroic adherence to authenticity and morality.

Jane's journey to the throne was the result of those reluctant to lose their position of power. In order to save the reforms of the Tudor dynasty and prevent the Catholic Mary from taking the throne, those ambitious men once in charge of Edward VI devised a plan to make Henry VIII's great niece, Jane Grey, queen. Forced to marry, she was an all but virginal teen-aged child-monarch whose reign was of short duration (nine or thirteen days, depending upon which source one consults). When Mary takes the throne from her, she offers the girl a choice: accept the "unreformed religion" or die, and it is this moment that Dickens exploits for his purpose.

Jane, unwilling to adopt a belief she cannot embrace as valid, refuses all negotiations when Mary offers her the choice to convert to Catholicism in order to save her life. Dickens presents a sympathetic and reverent account of the girl's short life and rule, presenting her as one of the most authentic characters in the *Child's History* when she refused to bow to "persua[sion]," even in the face of death. Instead, Jane "steadily refused" all attempts at bargaining for her life when Mary came in to challenge her for the throne, an indication of Jane's firm adherence to her own code of behavior and thought. Even in the face of death, when lesser men and women would have faltered, Jane "showed a constancy and calmness that will never be forgotten." As to her execution, Dickens says the wielder of the axe "never struck so cruel and so vile a blow as this" (290).

The concentration upon Jane as a martyr and model of goodness both fits and violates Dickens's purpose with the history, as Jann explained it. On the one hand, she is portrayed sympathetically and as a helpless character due to her youth and sex, yet she is a member of the nobility, a group continuously vilified by Dickens in the *Child's History*. However, the contradiction matters less in light of the attributes Dickens chooses to illuminate in his portrayal

of her. Though in reality she was a highly educated young girl who leaned towards religious fanaticism, she loses those unattractive traits (in the eyes of some Victorians) in the portrait Dickens paints of her. He transforms the fanaticism into unflinching authenticity, the ultimate example of how far one should take the belief in one's ethos. Like Nell, who resolves herself to death before she can submit to an unsuitable union of marriage or a state of dangerous sexuality and inauthenticity, Jane, also around the same age as Nell, who functions as a figurehead of England capable of producing new heirs, recognizes that she must die because her beliefs are so in contrast to those around her.

Strangely enough, Dickens must end his history with the portrayal of another female monarch: Queen Victoria. Out of political necessity, Dickens keeps her description extremely brief, only stating:

William the Fourth succeeded George the Fourth, in the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty, and reigned seven years. Queen Victoria, his niece, the only child of the Duke of Kent, the fourth son of George the Third, came to the throne on the twentieth of June, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-seven. She was married to Prince Albert of Saxe Gotha on the tenth of February, one thousand eight hundred and forty. She is very good, and much beloved. So I end, like the crier, with

God Save the Queen! (426-427)

Though not expressly stated, the brief portrayal implies that her history has yet to be written—and that it could be recorded as brutally by Dickens as those monarchs previously described. It is a careful warning and intriguing statement of authorial power on Dickens's part. Though Victoria is “very good, and much beloved” like Nell at this point in his history, she could be vilified and killed off at any moment with the stroke of his pen. He is a citizen of England, a

member of the middle class that now holds all of the power, and the memory of her reign is in his hands.²

Though Dickens appears to concentrate his efforts on his criticisms of the monarchy, “the people,” or the common citizens of England, continue to hover in the background as the backbone of their country. Dickens says that they are “hardy, brave, and strong,” and though they are usually described as being of the lower classes, they often resemble the future nineteenth-century middle class in formation (2). Dickens gives brief glimpses of hope for England’s future in his descriptions of the “the people,” and credits their ability to endure throughout time to the virtue and perfection of the common Englishman. His descriptions of them appear early on in the *Child’s History*, and clearly he believes that “the people” embody a model form of Englishness. For example, he says that among the Danes killed by Ethelred the Unready, he knew there to be many men “among them...[who were] peaceful Christian Danes who had married English women and become like English men” (30). As seen in both *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the glorified power of the English woman and home can lead to transformation. To emphasize that the unacceptable or foreign can become tamed into something “like English men” through marriage to a properly domestic English female elevates the status of the woman in transmitting such qualities—even though she, too, would have been one of those savages described in the history’s opening pages. Dickens admits that foreign influences may threaten England at any point—and they do in *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity*

² Though it is said that Dickens adored Queen Victoria when he was a young man, even going so far as to claim that he would “die for her” (Hibbert 483), Peter Ackroyd notes that Dickens did not cater to the queen as years went on, once even declining to give a special private performance of “The Frozen Deep” because it would mean that his daughters’ first appearance at court would be as actresses (783). Considering Dickens’s moral agenda, his increasingly superior attitude towards the queen indicates that he privileged the middle class above even the monarchy. His choice to end the *Child’s History* so abruptly shows that he is open to completing Queen Victoria’s history in any way he sees fit.

Shop, and the *Child's History*—but the potential of converting the foreign into the English shows readers that Dickens believes the power of the untitled Englishman is strong. Never mind the fact that the middle class is unknown at this time; like Oliver and Nell, these primitive Englishmen and Englishwomen are infused with middle-class virtues that will eventually make the country prosper.

The nineteenth-century point of view is alive and well in the *Child's History*. As Jann points out, Dickens praises those who rise up in the face of “the injustice of yesteryear,” but the difference between those defeated commoners against an all-powerful monarchy and the current situation in England is that the common people have more power (199). There is a dominant sense of optimism in the history, in spite of its negative stance towards those in control of England. The orphaned land of the past, once inhabited by savages, has changed, and those good savages—so unlike their rulers—are rising up with the potential to make England the most powerful land in the world. Whereas the kings and queens were once the walking embodiment of England, now the common people have truly risen up to take that spot and define the nation.

The ideas embedded in the *Child's History* supports mid-nineteenth century English visions of world domination. But the final warning of the *Child's History* is still problematic. Anxieties about middle-class power and fears about England's collapse take shape in this mid-century work by Dickens, but he does not abandon his concerns. Instead, the *Child's History* marks a turning point in how Dickens will approach the problems of class. From this point onward, the nation of England becomes a key player in his novels, and he takes the orphan metaphor begun in *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* into new territory. The *Child's History of England* makes clear that England is well established; and Dickens's ability to tell its history in his own way, completely to his own liking, indicates that the middle class is now in

control. From this point on, Dickens is no longer concerned with teaching individuals through the example of the orphaned hero who rises above the muck of the world. Instead, he shifts the orphan metaphor to represent the middle class and England as a whole as they and it go about nation building. Though individuals and individual agency will still be important to the development of the plot, these characters will be directly tied to England in ways unseen in Dickens's fiction before this point—and it is no accident that as he was working on the *Child's History* Dickens was also producing his masterpiece, *Bleak House*.

Bleak House: Oliver and Nell Covered in Muck

In *Bleak House*, Dickens makes clear that the core of England—the good and stable commoners of the *Child's History* who are now members of a powerful middle class—is under threat. The nation is in chaos, the narrator explains, and “England has been some weeks in the dismal strait of having no pilot...to weather the storm; and the marvellous part of the matter is that England has not appeared to care very much about it, but has gone on eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage as the old world did in the days before the flood” (589-590). The speaker, unnamed, could be of either sex, makes a common disgruntled voice of proper English middle-class citizens heard. Like the unisex version of England presented in the *Child's History*, this voice criticizes the failure of the country—only this time its criticisms fall upon the ruling middle class in order to make clear that this group is in danger of ruining both themselves and the nation.

The narrator continues to present England as being in a precarious condition, reminding readers of the image Dickens presented of the country in its most primitive state. London

becomes one of the dominant characters in the novel, with all manner of obstacles impeding its progress and success. In the famous opening passage of the novel, the “fog” takes center stage in the city, corrupting the reader’s vision even as it serves as a figure for the endemic obfuscation to come.³ The description of the cityscape lacks the clarity that is evident in the beginning of the *Child’s History*, because even though dark and stormy, readers still make out the landscape that is England in that book. In *Bleak House* there is no clarity or bright spot of virtue—no pure and good Olivers or Nells running about and shining brightly in the mud of London. Instead, everything, even the animals, is obscured from their true appearance and people are losing “their foot-hold,” quite literally, in the world (11).

Like the horrible monarchs who corrupted England, the worst characters in *Bleak House* are motivated by greed and wealth; unlike the *Child’s History*, however, where villains came from the aristocracy or nobility, the evildoers in Chancery are middle-class merchants so consumed with immorality and vice that they “cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds.” Frighteningly, unlike in previous novels where the “deadened worlds” had been those separated from the middle class (like the working-class wasteland towns Nell encounters as she wanders), here we see the “deadening” of specific places controlled by the middle class, where “growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air.” These are spaces where the fog of obscurity and inauthenticity may never lift.

³ The fog has also been noted as a Gothic device, similar to the Gothic aspects found in *The Old Curiosity Shop* or *Wuthering Heights*. In “The Urban Gothic of *Bleak House*,” Allan Pritchard argues, “At the center of *Bleak House* lies the unprecedented subject of the great modern city and its horrors, a city on a larger scale than had previously been known, where there were inhabitants...who had scarcely even seen the country” (433). In essence, in the beginning of *Bleak House*, Dickens has abandoned the rural retreat of the countryside that sustained Nell for a time. Now all are trapped in this new type of Gothic environment, made worse by the blinding fog, which “marks *Bleak House* as a Gothic novel just as clearly as the title itself” (441).

As Karen Jahn points out in “Fit to Survive: Christian Ethics in *Bleak House*,” seeing clearly and beyond the fog invading England is tied to Victorian concepts of morality. “We see the city through a moral telescope which focuses on Chancery as the type of England’s destruction,” she explains. “Each object of the landscape—horses, foot-passengers, fog—is mired in England’s decay. The fog is hardly a pathetic fallacy, for London...of [the] mid-century was thick with coal dust, decay, and industrial wastes. Yet it operates symbolically to expose the evil of Chancery” (371). The middle class is now in control, overcoming centuries of foul rule by corrupt kings and queens, but it is no longer presented as a respite or panacea to the wrongs of society. Now it is the primary problem, and the combination of English space and the middle class is represented within each character in the novel. Their success or failure depends upon how they can overcome the wrongs in England and make clear that which is obscured by corruption. Once again, Dickens will present the reader with new renditions of Oliver and Nell, and while there are failures, Dickens also tells the reader that there is a solution: if the middle class molds the English nation into a representation of itself, then the country could be invincible.

A. Unable to “Move On”: The Regression of Oliver and Nell

More than any novel written by Dickens thus far, *Bleak House* is a text littered with orphans and orphanhood. Unlike in *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, however, there are few orphans in *Bleak House* that bear markers of virtue, authenticity, or success. Instead, the orphans in the book live in a state of confusion and chaos, and even the best of them struggle to rise above the mud and see through the darkness and fog. The search for authenticity is the driving force for the good characters—even though some of them may die in the pursuit of it. In

this novel, Olivers must worry about more than making their own way in the world and becoming authentic and moral middle-class men. Whereas in the past their goal was to contribute to their own class, now they must build up and remake England so that it reflects proper middle-class values. Similarly, the Nells of *Bleak House* must not only find a proper home and become authentic and moral women, but they also must help England to become its most authentic and moral self as well.

Allan Woodcourt and Esther Summerson are the most successful versions of Oliver and Nell in *Bleak House*, but there are also failed versions of them in the novel. The reason for their lack of success, however, comes as a result of them being influenced by the tainted entity of England or by those who represent corrupted English institutions. Upon first glance, the most obvious character bearing resemblance to Oliver Twist is the little street orphan, Jo. The child embodies all of Oliver's goodness and morality, though in his ignorance we can only assume that his inclination towards goodness is something inborn in him rather than something learned. Jo, however, is a frightening incarnation of Oliver Twist, a child with all of his goodness and authenticity but who has no hope of surviving in an England that does not operate according to middle-class values. In his portrayal of a child being killed by the problems at play in his own country, Dickens makes readers aware of the fact that England as a whole is doomed unless the middle class returns to what made it good, which will in turn force the English state to adopt its values and reform.⁴

⁴ Though many critics point out that Jo's depiction highlights the fact that religious and charitable organizations spend more time helping those in foreign lands rather than those in their own country, others also explain that Jo is neglected by the government. As pointed out in Timothy L. Carens's "The Civilizing Mission at Home: Empire, Gender, and National Reform in *Bleak House*," Queen Victoria sanctioned mission/charity work in Africa, yet she allows her own homeless and suffering children to die in the streets. In essence, this is a criticism of the queen, the government, and religion, something that Dickens will return to in Jo's death scene.

Dickens allows the reader to see just enough similarities between Oliver's and Jo's lives that Jo's outcome becomes that much more devastating. Revising scenes found in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens places Jo in situations that offer no possible relief or reward. For example, one scene in *Bleak House* that closely mirrors a scene in *Oliver Twist* occurs when Mr. Snagsby intervenes on Jo's behalf when the child finds himself in trouble with the police. Just as Mr. Brownlow defended Oliver because he recognized goodness in the child and knows he did not commit a crime, Snagsby also tries to protect Jo. Snagsby does save the child from arrest, but the difference in the situations indicates the thematic shift between the two books. The crime in *Oliver Twist* is definite and singular: Oliver is either guilty or not guilty of physically stealing from Mr. Brownlow—an individual crime that determines the individual morality of a single person. Jo, however, has committed no real crime—certainly no crime that calls into question his morality. The police are simply upset that Jo “won’t move on.” Jo’s reply to the accusation significantly shows the difference between himself and his situation and that of Oliver’s. Jo, refuting the charges, says, “‘I’m always a-moving on, sar,...I’ve always been a-moving and a-moving on, ever since I was born. Where can I possibly move to, sir, more nor I do move!’” (284) Several important differences between Jo’s character and Oliver’s are revealed in this passage. First, Jo indicates that he always tries to do what he is told, “a-moving on” whenever someone indicates that he should. Secondly, and more important, unlike Oliver, Jo is not aware that he should even be looking for a home. He does not know where to go or how to go about finding a permanent place to live. Though readers know that he officially sleeps in Tom-All-Alone’s, the emphasis on moving and moving—and that police enforcing judicial norms supported by the middle class are making him move—shows that society is failing this child who is otherwise a good candidate to become a model citizen (even if it only among his own class,

much like Kit, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*). Instead of shuffling him around, those in charge should be encouraging some sort of stability. In painting his character, Dickens appears to be saying that a child without any genetic ties to the middle class can be as moral and authentic as he wants in 1850s England, but he still will not survive because English and middle-class corruption will not allow him to live. This message is in direct opposition to that found in the *Child's History*, where always at the core of England's best features is the good and faithful middle class (even in time periods when that class did not exist).

The emphasis upon “moving on” as a concept also reflects the state of England during the 1850s. The phrase “moving on” can be directly tied to middle-class philosophy about progress—the driving force of the nation. But this philosophy had already been criticized before Dickens wrote *Bleak House*. In 1850, in an article titled “Democracy and Its Mission” published in *The English Review*, an anonymous author asks, “What is meant by progress? They tell us continually to ‘move on,’ and they must not be surprised if we ask them where we are going” (316). Granted, the author is being sarcastic, just as Dickens's sarcasm rings true in the description of Jo being asked to move on. The notion of movement should imply progress, but in both cases described here, “moving on” seems nothing more than standing still. Like Dickens's critique of the police (who are representing the English law forcing Jo's mock progress in “moving on” that is so directly opposed to Oliver's purposeful movement in a fixed direction), the criticism berates not only the government but the middle class as well. Though the class once had definite purpose and direction, now it is confused. Its Olivers, who were once the shining examples of real progress, cannot move forward and succeed. Even worse, if the government is being run in this way (as seen in Chancery), then the nation soon could falter as well.

Even established middle-class men like Snagsby show signs of decay in their adherence to strict morality and virtue. Though a good man, Snagsby lacks the ability long term to stop what is happening to Jo. He rather ineffectively mumbles that Jo's lack of a defined space is indeed a problem, but rather than exercising any power he might have, Snagsby instead "says nothing at all indeed, but coughs his forlornest cough, expressive of no thoroughfare in any direction" (285). Snagsby by the end is becoming as "direction[less]" as Jo—a horrifying thought for a nation that might have seen Snagsby as a positive example of what one might become. The narrator—Dickens or whoever it may be—is so disturbed by the situation that he/she breaks into the narrative, stating, "It is nothing to you or to any one else that the great lights of the parliamentary sky have failed for some few years in this business to set you the example of moving on. The one grand recipe remains for you—the profound philosophical prescription—the be-all and the end-all of your strange existence upon earth. Move on!" (285) As so often happens in *Bleak House*, the failure of a character is related not to another individual's failure but to a nation's failure. The shift shows Dickens's wish that the entire society operate from a middle-class standpoint. He will make transparent through Jo's character that, even though the middle class is in control, it is by no means handling the country by enacting the same values that made it great in the first place.

Society's lack of concern over Jo's future will have devastating consequences in the novel. As an improperly developed and molded citizen, he becomes one of the most dangerous characters in the plot, having access to knowledge that could bring down an established family. Jo's danger is highlighted through the concept of infection and his dangerous inability to be stay in one place. His constant wandering allows him to inadvertently taint all levels of society in

spite of his goodness and morality, allowing Dickens to make the point that, though the middle class may be in control of many things, it is obviously neglecting problems on the home front.

The issues surrounding the contagion that Jo represents are often shown in Dickensian scholarship about *Bleak House*. One of the most comprehensive studies of the theme of contagion in the novel appears in Allan Conrad Christensen's *Nineteenth-century Narratives of Contagion: 'Our Feverish Contact'* (2005). Christensen explains that Jo's "position beyond the pale of civilized and animal hierarchies makes him an especially appropriate scapegoat whose sacrifice can help restore the components of a diseased society to their own appropriate orders and places" (63). He continues to say that the child "functions as not only a victim but an emblem of history itself.... The disease that has struck him and that he carries as a contaminating presence wherever he circulates makes him an emblem in particular to the blind, pervasive inevitability of the circulating historical contagion" (283). Christensen's statement that Jo is a historical symbol with the power to corrupt those around him fits in interestingly with how Dickens appears to be discussing his concerns about England as he began them in the *Child's History*. Even more interesting is the idea of Jo being one who "restore[s] the components of a diseased society to...order." His ability to slip between locations and classes heightens his symbolic function in the novel, and in his goodness he ensures that everything will become clear even though he must die in the mud. Though his ability to sicken someone like Esther Summerson may seem to be dangerous (and, indeed, it is), it is also necessary and purifying, bringing truth to a narrative wrapped in inauthenticity.

Had he been helped in the first place, Jo would never have had the opportunity to become dangerous. Dickens allows the child to have contact with or view establishments that should be willing to help the poor, including "the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign

Parts” (237) and St. Paul’s Cathedral (290), in order to emphasize that the English are neglecting their duty towards their own poor citizens. The “Society” ignores the British poor and is only interested in philanthropic work in far off lands, and St. Paul’s, a symbol of Christianity, a religion that emphasizes helping the poor, only looms in the distance, noble and too good for Jo who can only gaze ignorantly at the edifice that perches “so high up, so far out of his reach” (290-291). However, these institutions function as more than simple charitable organizations that operate in the name of England. In many ways, they should be seen as parental figures who neglect those in their charge. Those in need of charity are often dependent upon philanthropic organizations for the most basic necessities in life, in many ways mirroring the way children are dependent upon parents. Jo is the literal orphan in the story, symbolizing not only the poor of England but also all of England’s citizens. He is the ultimate victim because he is ignored and “mov[ed] on” by both poor and rich, private middle-class citizen and representatives of the government.

Dickens makes this neglect abundantly clear in Jo’s death scene. Once the child dies, Dickens emphasizes the breakdown of responsibility at all levels in society. He writes, “Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us, every day” (677). Dickens attacks many levels of society in this statement, perhaps the most powerful statement in the novel that reveals the argument at the core of *Bleak House*. For the first time, Dickens indicts the monarchy, stating that the ultimate mother and figurehead of England, Queen Victoria, is at fault for allowing her own people (i.e. the children of England) to die in this manner, failing in her role as mother to the nation and no longer a figure of “[m]ajesty” in Dickens’s eyes.

Dickens also accuses the “lords and gentlemen” and the “Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends.” However, Dickens’s most powerful statement comes at the end when he says, “Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us, every day.” The accusation could not be more obvious. Dickens places the destruction of the novel’s best character most prominently on the conscience of the middle class. Additionally, Dickens includes himself and the reader in this indictment, saying that those like Jo are “dying around *us*, every day” [italics my emphasis]. All institutions have failed England, especially those institutions that claim most responsibility; and, the breakdown of these institutions has led to the demise of every British citizen—and especially the middle class.

While Dickens does use *Bleak House* to show the problems facing Britain’s poor, perhaps his greatest social criticism in the novel is generated out of a more domestic concern. Through his portrayal of the death of the family due to parental neglect at all levels of society, Dickens shows that there is not only one Bleak House, but that all of England is a Bleak House. As Alice van Buren Kelley explains in her 1970 article “The Bleak Houses of *Bleak House*,” “As the novel opens, Dickens presents a front view of the greatest of his bleak houses, England, whose windows to human suffering are misted over by the pettifoggery of an archaic parliamentary and legal system bogged down in tradition and technicalities” (254). She further notes that Chancery and poverty are tied together due to the simple fact that “Tom-All-Alone’s is, of course, in Chancery” (257). However, while there is the definite notice of the ineffectual legal system⁵ in *Bleak House*, the truth is that everyone in England is “all-Alone,” because the ultimate governing institutions—institutions that mirror parental responsibility and that increasingly are run by more

⁵ For an examination of Dickens’s specific calls for legal reform in *Bleak House*, see Kieran Dolin’s *Fiction and the Law: Legal Discourse in Victorian and Modernist Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

and more middle-class citizens—have neglected their wards. Due to the lack of responsibility exhibited by England's (and the novel's) monarchy and legal systems, wives and husbands, mothers and fathers, and all of England's citizens are without proper guidance, and therefore everyone is an orphaned ward of an ineffective system, much like "the people" left to the mercy of England's horrible rulers in the *Child's History*.

But Jo, of course, is a street child. Though his fate is sad enough, Dickens must make it even more relevant by creating yet another failed Oliver—Richard Carstone. Fascinatingly, Richard is a new version of an already revised Oliver—Dick Swiveller. Like Swiveller, Richard Carstone is a young man refusing to take responsibility for his own income and life. Both float along in the world, expecting others to care for them (much like Harold Skimpole, as well), but there are important differences in their characters. Swiveller had to learn morality and authenticity as the story progressed, attaining these virtues only after experiencing what he internally noticed as a corrupt home and corrupt women. His complete salvation comes at the hands of the Marchioness, and as a reward of their reform, the two end up happily married.

Richard Carstone's character is very different. Like Oliver and Swiveller before him, he is a middle-class orphan who has been denied a proper upbringing, but unlike them, Richard begins the novel as a moral and somewhat authentic person who has already found his domestic angel in the character of his orphaned cousin, Ada. His downfall becomes even more puzzling to readers because, even after John Jarndyce takes the young man into his home, Richard falls into degradation. He behaves well until he is forced out into the world to embrace a profession, and it becomes obvious that something is critically wrong with this version of Oliver, one who is hopelessly doomed.

Readers do not immediately see Richard as an at-risk orphan. Early in the novel, he even admirably proclaims, “I shall have to work my own way,” recognizing that he must take a profession and make his way in the world (127). It soon becomes obvious, however, that Richard is not capable of doing so—not even of making a decision about what career path to take.

Whereas Dickens makes indisputable in *The Old Curiosity Shop* that Dick Swiveller is solely responsible for his own problems, in *Bleak House* he blames the corruption of England, as represented by the Court of Chancery, for Richard’s problems. In the words of John Jarndyce,

‘How much of this indecision of character...is chargeable on that incomprehensible heap of uncertainty and procrastination on which he has been thrown from his birth, I don't pretend to say; but that Chancery, among its other sins, is responsible for some of it, I can plainly see. It has engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off—and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance—and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused. The character of much older and steadier people may be even changed by the circumstances surrounding them. It would be too much to expect that a boy's, in its formation, should be the subject of such influences and escape them.’ (180)

Like Oliver and Dick Swiveller, Richard is another child who wades through the “incomprehensible heap of uncertainty” that surrounded “his birth.” The image, of course, reminds readers specifically of Oliver’s birth, but it is also the birth of the middle class itself; and now Richard’s fumbling and “procrastination” cuts to the heart of what is wrong with the middle class in 1853 (at least in Dickens’s point of view). All of these faults originate with and multiply through the young man’s management by “Chancery,” a system of the government, like many systems of government in the novel, acting in loco parentis—and failing miserably.⁶

⁶ Dickens highlights the faults of Chancery functioning as a home or parent in *Bleak House* by showing the consequences of what happens if middle-class citizens place their faith in the corrupt system of government to manage their lives as opposed to their own system, which is based upon the sanctity of the home. As Kevin McLaughlin posits in “Losing One’s Place: Displacement and Domesticity in Dickens’s *Bleak House*,” the novel “opens with the threat posed to the institution of the home by the radical disorder of official legal institutions,

As time goes on, the reader sees that Richard's case is hopeless. The further involved Richard becomes with Chancery, the further he slips into the defunct system of the English legal system, becoming unrecognizable among the many other people trying to claim a judgment in the case.⁷ The distraction of the court pulls Richard from a life of work, and Esther notes, "[His] industry was all misdirected. I could not find that it led to anything but the formation of delusive hopes in connexion with the suit already the pernicious cause of so much sorrow and ruin" (340). In an age of innovation and progress, the fact that Richard's "industry" is focused on a court case in a corrupt and dysfunctional system shows that England is in real danger of having its next generation of middle-class young men lacking the ability to succeed. Richard slowly deteriorates, "[sinking] deeper in the infatuation," "haunt[ing] the court," and even becoming friends with Miss Flite, forming a "fatal link...between his fresh youth and her faded age, between his free hopes and her caged birds, and her hungry garret, and her wandering mind" (340-341).

Unlike in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens allows such a man to marry a suitable wife without reforming. He is so far deteriorated, however, that even marriage cannot save him. Though Ada says that she "had some little hope that [she] might be able to convince him of his mistake, that he might come to regard it in a new way as [her] husband and not pursue it all the more desperately for [her] sake," Dickens does not allow her to save Richard in the same way the Marchioness saves Dick Swiveller (858). Richard also experiences illness, but he never emerges from it. Dickens, however, does allow Richard some redemption in his constant calling for Allan

specifically Chancery Court.... Most damaging about the Court's challenge to domestic order, it seems, are the consequences it holds for individual subjects, who turn to the Court, rather than to hearth and home, for order" (877). Chancery, then, is the epitome of what the middle-class home could devolve into should the middle-class continue to allow the corrupt government systems to dominate their lives and country.

⁷ Kevin McLaughlin also proposes that out of all of the characters in *Bleak House* "who are effectively destroyed as subjects by the disorder of the Court" Richard Carstone is most damaged (877).

Woodcourt, the model of male authenticity and morality in the novel. The scene reminds readers of Dick Swiveller's awakening after his illness, when he looked around the room and discovered that, in his purified state, he was surrounded by gentlemen. In Richard Carstone's case, however, being surrounded by gentlemen does not help him recover his lost place in the world. To his credit, Richard admits his mistakes, saying that he has "learned a lesson now" (903). He wants to recover in the one authentic home in the novel—Esther's and Allan's home—but he cannot. Richard's death is necessary, for there is no hope of recovery for one so corrupted by England.

Jo and Richard Carstone embrace the two aspects of Oliver's character that led to his success. Jo embodies the good child's unfailing authenticity and morality, while Richard enacts Oliver's journey once the boy is taken in by Mr. Brownlow and given a home and an opportunity to succeed. The demise of such characters at the hands of a corrupt country rather than an evil individual is frightening enough, but their outcome becomes that much more meaningful in light of the fact that they are dying at the hands of an England run by the middle class.

B. Nell Purified: The Significance of Lady Honoria Dedlock

The worst reincarnations of Nell in *Bleak House* are similarly affected as the failed Olivers by how much they allow the negative and corrupt institutions and people of England to influence them. Esther, of course, allows Dickens the opportunity to write a version of Nell that succeeds. He also, however, presents readers with a devastating version of another Nell, only this time it is a version of Nell grown up and living the life he most feared for her. Lady Honoria Dedlock, an adult version of Nell, horrifies the reader, because even though she perhaps began life as a pure version of Nell, something went horribly wrong. Though it is not expressly stated within the story, evidence seems to indicate that Honoria came from a middle- to upper-middle-

class family. Certainly, the sister who raises Esther, Honoria's illegitimate daughter, is not overly wealthy, and Honoria did consider running off with a soldier in her youth.

Honoria's affair with Capt. James Hawdon, which resulted in her hidden pregnancy, was the first visible step towards her downfall; however, the implication that she was allowed the freedom to roam long enough and far enough from home and proper supervision implies that improper parenting is the origin of her troubles. All of these issues culminate in her choice of a mate, and, in a startling description of Hawdon, readers are reminded of other lapsed Nells like Catherine Earnshaw, who willingly chose vagrancy and the foreign rather than the security of the domestic. At his death, Hawdon is described as "liv[ing] so wretchedly and was so neglected, with his gipsy color, and his wild black hair and beard, that...[he was] the commonest of the common...[though t]he surgeon had a notion that he had once been something better, both in appearance and condition" (178). Hawdon's similarities with Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights* come to light in this description, though this is a version of Heathcliff who has fallen as low as possible. His better "condition" of long ago was destroyed, perhaps through the residue left by his relationship with Honoria. Dickens, however, leaves readers little more knowledge of the man.

The only residue left over from that relationship can be found in Honoria's history and the eventual acknowledgment of Esther's birth. The secrecy of Honoria's relationship with Hawdon and the resulting secret birth and subsequent denial of her child were all circumstances that led Lady Dedlock to develop a new identity and to become, to all appearances, the most inauthentic character in *Bleak House*. She misrepresents herself to Sir Dedlock and marries into a long established family, but her double life and the mask she wears for her husband prove her to be very dangerous. She, like Jo, because of her secrets and ability to pass between various class barriers, threatens and infects all of those around her, and the narrator points to the fact that at

times her “movements are uncertain” (17). The inability to pinpoint her movements, her insistence upon moving around constantly, heightens her preference for itinerancy and the foreign, but it also forces the reader to see her inauthentic nature.

Disguise governs Honoria’s life, and as Lady Dedlock she often “shade[s] her face” (22). The narrator says that she has “[a]n exhausted composure, a worn-out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by interest or satisfaction, [which] are the trophies of her victory” (19). Furthermore, she “is always the same exhausted deity, surrounded by worshippers, and terribly liable to be bored to death, even while presiding at her own shrine” (179). At first glance, one might perhaps see this description as an indication of the indifference and selfishness displayed by some of the aristocracy, but later readers discover that this is merely a mask to hide her true self.

When Lady Dedlock finally reveals to Esther that she is her mother, Esther is startled by the encounter that began so properly and coldly, but that ends with Lady Dedlock “[catching Esther] to her breast, kiss[ing her], we[eping] over [her],...and call[ing her] back to [her]self.” Lady Dedlock “[falls to]...her knees and crie[s],” showing the first sign of uncontrolled emotion readers have seen from her, other than fainting at certain times or private moments of panic (535). Over and over again in this exchange, Lady Honoria Dedlock reveals her “dishonor” (536). Her emotional breakdown understandably is due to the stress of living inauthentically and realizing that she has abandoned her daughter and the chance to be a mother, even though, according to her, she was told Esther was dead.

Honoria Dedlock may lack outward authenticity, but there can be some merit found in her attempts to keep what she has of a home intact. The reader sees her struggle with authenticity during a moment of conversation when she tells Esther that she cannot see her or acknowledge

her. Lady Dedlock says that the secret is her “earthly punishment...[and that she must] bear it, and...hide it” (535). Esther, listening to this pronouncement, sees her mother “[draw] her habitual air of proud indifference about her like a veil, though she soon cast it off again.” The moment is fascinating, for the reader watches Honoria “veil” herself and then make herself authentic again. Honoria voices her reason for secrecy to Esther, saying, “I must keep this secret, if by any means it can be kept, not wholly for myself. I have a husband, wretched and dishonouring creature that I am!” (536)

When Esther tells her mother to “rise” from the ground, Honoria refuses. “She said, no, no, no,” Esther explained, “she could only speak to me so; she must be proud and disdainful everywhere else; she would be humbled and ashamed there, in the only natural moments of her life” (536). It is in this moment that Honoria claims at least some credit in Dickens’s world. She, as a false member of a class full of false people, lowers herself to the most authentic middle-class female character in the novel, admitting her faults. Though this makes no difference to the public world, at least Lady Dedlock is attempting to atone for her sins privately, in a quickly rendered domestic space in the gardens around the infamous “Ghost’s Walk,” where rumor has it a wife who betrayed her husband met her untimely demise.

In the end, Lady Dedlock forces her death in order to restore some order to the world of the story, freeing the novel from her contaminating influence. She takes herself into the wastelands, similar to the ones that so sickened little Nell, and meets her end.⁸ She dies in

⁸ In an intriguing analysis of Lady Dedlock’s death scene contained in “‘The Narrow Track of Blood’: Detection and Storytelling in *Bleak House*,” Peter Thoms suggests that her type of suicidal death is “a final gesture of control over a life story that is quickly falling into the hands of others” (154). He goes on to say, “Thus Lady Dedlock no longer has a self to erase because, in her mind, she has become the property of others—constructed in the gossip passed from mouth to mouth and in the sensational journalism published in newspapers. She does not hide in death but is hounded to that final destination where...she is devoured by a hungry public” (155). In

silence, and the narrator gives a strange account of her death, asking:

Where is she? Living or dead, where is she?...On the waste where the brick-kilns are burning with a pale blue flare, where the straw-roofs of the wretched huts in which the bricks are made are being scattered by the wind, where the clay and water are hard frozen and the mill in which the gaunt blind horse goes round all day looks like an instrument of human torture—traversing this deserted, blighted spot there is a lonely figure with the sad world to itself, pelted by the snow and driven by the wind, and cast out, it would seem, from all companionship. It is the figure of a woman, too; but it is miserably dressed, and no such clothes ever came through the hall and out at the great door of the Dedlock mansion. (798-801)

Honorina takes a symbolic tainting journey just like Nell, wandering past homes that are not model homes, into a hellish atmosphere that is a “deserted, blighted spot,” reminding readers of the “blighted” landscape Nell encountered as well. She isolates herself, and becomes unidentifiable, in much the same way Nell became an “it” after her horrible encounter. Lady Dedlock, too, has abandoned all outward markers of her false class, instead appearing “miserably dressed” in clothing that never “came though the hall and out at the great door of the Dedlock mansion.” Only here she is in the heart of London, wandering through areas which have already symbolically come to represent the worst of England’s problems. Lady Dedlock, as a former middle-class woman, comes here to die. The errant Nell, brought low by immorality and inauthenticity, must make a sacrifice of herself in order to allow both the corrupt upper class family to die as well as her tainting influence to be destroyed.

some ways, Thoms’s explanation of Lady Dedlock’s demise is much like Nell’s, for by the time Nell has become corrupted by her journey she, too, is “no longer...a self.” Like Lady Dedlock, Nell, should she have lived, would have been subject to gossip and judgment due to her wandering from the home, her journeys into undesirable locations, and her association with all types of corrupt people.

C. Long Live the Queen: The Union of Allan Woodcourt and Esther Summerson

Out of the disorder and chaos that is London and the middle class appear two characters Dickens hopes will serve as models for England's future. In the portrayal of Allan Woodcourt and Esther Summerson, Dickens implies that the middle class can succeed again if it will go back to its core values of authenticity and morality. Of even more importance, those who do so can save England and lift it out of the destructive fog. Allan is *Oliver Twist* renewed, a self-made man of unwavering authenticity and morality, who directly inserts himself into each troubled area of England symbolically represented in the novel. He purifies these areas of destruction in a properly masculine way, through his virtues and his profession. Esther Summerson, naturally paired with Allan, restores the world from the inside out, reforming all she touches with domestic grace. Their stories are linked, and Dickens's vision for England's redemption can only be understood by analyzing how these two characters function together.

Though we do not meet him as a child and do not fully know his family history, readers soon learn that Allan Woodcourt is the model for middle-class male behavior in *Bleak House*. He could have turned out poorly, even though he was born legitimately, because he was a half-orphan during his youth, and his mother put all of her time and effort into making sure that he would succeed. Though she seems to be more concerned with social climbing and running her family by rules of the aristocracy, always stating that Allan must "remember his pedigree and...on no account form an alliance below it," other elements in his background (such as his schooling and willingness to make his way in the world) gave him enough strength to break from his mother's influence in his choice of favoring Esther, a woman of questionable birth but who he instantly recognizes as being his perfect moral and authentic match (256).

Like the reformed Dick Swiveller and Kit in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Allan Woodcourt's authenticity is established early on in constant referrals to him as a serious character. When Esther first meets him, she explains that he is a "rather reserved" man, a "gentleman," in fact. Strangely, like Honoria's mate, Allan is also of a "dark complexion;" but if Allan Woodcourt was ever a Gypsy, he is now the industrious and reformed Heathcliff (197). Later, in her conversation with Mrs. Badger, readers discover that, unlike Richard, Allan is a man of true industry, who "take[s]...a strong interest in [his career]...[and] will find some reward in it through a great deal of work for a very little money and through years of considerable endurance and disappointment" (246). Allan is making his way in the world, taking all of the proper and necessary steps to establish himself before he begins a family. Esther immediately recognizes Allan's authenticity and when she has her own extended encounter with him over dinner a few pages later, she takes pains to describe his background and character to the reader. She states:

I believe—at least I know—that he was not rich. All his widowed mother could spare had been spent in qualifying him for his profession. It was not lucrative to a young practitioner, with very little influence in London; and although he was, night and day, at the service of numbers of poor people and did wonders of gentleness and skill for them, he gained very little by it in money. He was seven years older than I. Not that I need mention it, for it hardly seems to belong to anything.

I think—I mean, he told us—that he had been in practice three or four years and that if he could have hoped to contend through three or four more, he would not have made the voyage on which he was bound. But he had no fortune or private means, and so he was going away. He had been to see us several times altogether. We thought it a pity he should go away. Because he was distinguished in his art among those who knew it best, and some of the greatest men belonging to it had a high opinion of him. (255)

Her insistence upon clarifying between "believe" and "know", and "think" and "told," at the beginning of each paragraph in the quoted passage shows that she wants to be clear that what she relates is not her interpretation of the meeting but of what actually happened. Of course, this careful monitoring of detail speaks volumes about Esther's own credibility, but she is also

forcing readers to see the veritable goodness in Allan.⁹ That she “know[s]” for sure things that he actually “told” the dinner guests means that Allan is not being deceptive at all, something quite rare for a character in *Bleak House*. And though Esther says that such a trivial detail as the fact that he is “seven years older than” herself “seems to belong to nothing,” the reader recognizes that it is everything, for both Allan and Esther are meant to form the perfect union in the novel.

Allan, though attracted to Esther, recognizes that he does not have the means to marry her and provide for her independently. He decides to leave England and serve as a ship surgeon on a voyage to the Empire. Though he is shipwrecked and becomes a hero, returning with a “sunburnt fac[e]” that indicated his dedication to hard work in trying situations, he admits that he had not made his fortune abroad (651). His undertaking of this voyage further affirms his role as a properly molded middle-class male, for his actions of sacrifice prepare him for marriage and to be a leader as a middle-class man in his own country. It is significant that his fortune was not made abroad, for Dickens hoped to keep his prosperity close to home.

Allan and Esther’s conversion becomes visible in their altered appearances when they meet again. Allan’s voyage has changed him in many ways and Esther’s battle with small pox has damaged her health. The outward signs of their respective trials are immediately noticeable: Allan bears the mark of the sun from his hard work outdoors and Esther’s face is scarred. The alterations are temporary but significant, because the actions that lead to their appearances are

⁹ The critical conversation surrounding Esther as a narrator is usually unflattering, however her narration serves an important purpose, showing readers how she changes from an insecure autobiographer into an authentic observer and participant in her life. In “‘The Mere Truth Won’t Do’: Esther as Narrator in *Bleak House*,” Joseph Sawicki explains, “Not only is Esther a more complicated character than we used to believe..., but...[she also] has more interest as a narrator than has been apparent” (211). Though at the beginning of the novel she is somewhat obscure in her criticisms, “after her illness, ...Esther the narrator...[is] more explicit in her comments about other characters” (215). This transition makes perfect sense when viewing Esther alongside other Dickensian heroines, like Rose and Nell, who also become more authentic after their respective illnesses.

class related. Esther's scarring is caused by smallpox (the worst of which gradually disappears) she caught from the street child Jo, and Allan's sunburn came from his work outdoors—work very unlike what most middle-class men and physicians would experience, because outdoor work is usually associated with the lower classes. Perhaps this is the strongest link between the two of them to Oliver and Nell, for it is a symbolic and physical way to overcome a life experience among the lower classes to which they do not belong. Whereas both Oliver and Nell experienced troubling times among the lower classes in their lives, Allan and Esther are allowed to do so symbolically—though they both have real-life encounters with the street child, Jo, that define their characters as proper representatives of England.

In both instances, unlike the failing institutions around them, both Allan and Esther properly address the problem of Jo and attempt to help him in an authentic and moral way unclouded by bureaucracy and selfishness, but also proper for their gender roles in Victorian middle-class society. When Jo appears in front of Esther, suffering from fever and very ill, Esther takes him into her personal care, not caring that the child is filthy or below her class. Though Harold Skimpole advises that Esther “[turn] him out before he gets still worse” (454), she refuses, her only thought being that she was glad to go “to bed very happy to think that he [Jo] was sheltered” (458). Esther, constantly referred to as a mother figure throughout the novel, enacts that role here, doing for Jo what no one else will do and emphasizing that mother England should do the same.

Allan Woodcourt, like Esther, takes responsibility for the problems around him rather than ignoring them, as the rest of England appears to be doing. Unlike the members of parliament or the aristocracy, or even the charities, Allan takes it upon himself to look at and analyze the problems of the poor. He visits Tom-All-Alone's, where Jo lives, walking among

them as “[a] brown sunburnt gentleman, who appears in some inaptitude for sleep [who is]...wandering abroad rather than counting the hours on a restless pillow.... Attracted by curiosity, he often pauses and looks about him, up and down the miserable by-ways. Nor is he merely curious, for in his bright dark eye there is compassionate interest; and as he looks here and there, he seems to understand such wretchedness and to have studied it before” (657). By taking “interest” in what is around him and the problems of England, in being an active player, Allan approaches the problem of poverty on his own soil, making a serious study of it in a “compassionate” way. His eyes are “bright,” another indication of his authenticity, and Dickens makes sure that readers know that his is not a passing moment of feeling, but a true concern, for he has been in the neighborhood on multiple occasions and “[has] studied it before.”

It is also Allan who attends Jo on his deathbed, in spite of the threat of contagion and the differences between them. When he finds Jo on the street after he has run away from Esther’s care, Allan hears Jo explain that he feared for Esther’s health and that was the reason he ran from her. In response to the story, the narrator tells readers: “Allan Woodcourt sees that this is not a sham” (652). Recognizing the goodness and authenticity in Jo, Allan takes the child into his care, in much the same way Mr. Brownlow took in Oliver, and comforts him during his final moments.

Allan is not at risk from Jo as Esther was, for Allan has established himself in the world and secured his existence. Esther’s home, unsecured by Allan at this point, was open to contagion, emphasizing once again the importance of maintaining the purity of the domestic space. Allan’s position allows him to make a difference, however, and he obtains proper lodging for the boy. Allan remains true to his profession as he provides medical care for the child and acts upon his interests for the impoverished. In his last service for Jo, Allan functions as a moral

guide, teaching the child a prayer and authenticating him as a true member of society. By teaching Jo the Lord's Prayer, he allows the child to become a worthy member of society who could matter in ways society overlooked him before.¹⁰ In knowing the Lord's Prayer, his testimony now counts, both within the novel's plot and within the reader's mind. It is too little, too late, of course, but the symbolic meaning remains powerful and solidifies Allan Woodcourt as the model for both England and middle-class men—and a worthy husband for someone like Esther Summerson.

Esther's character may not seem to be a proper candidate for comparison with the wandering Nell, but in her portrayal Dickens finally finds a way to produce a female version of Oliver Twist who can live to successfully become a model middle-class citizen and save her nation. Esther's name is also significant, as pointed out by Olga Stuchebrukhov in "*Bleak House* as an Allegory of a Middle-Class Nation." In this article, Stuchebrukhov explains, "Through Esther, Dickens rewrites the biblical story of Esther in the middle-class terms: unlike the biblical Esther, who saves her nation by using her beauty and sexuality, Dickens's middle-class Esther saves her nation by subjugating her sexuality to duty and reason" (160). Stuchebrukhov also sees similarities between Esther and Nell, stating, "Dickens's partiality to the allegorical notion of progress is illustrated by his frequent use of it in different novels. We see it in Nell's, Oliver Twist's, and finally in Esther's progress.... It is Esther's nation-building duty prescribed to her by the middle-class expectation of woman's redeeming and self-sacrificial nature that expands

¹⁰ Please see K. J. Fielding's and Alec W. Brice's "Charles Dickens on 'The Exclusion of Evidence' I," *The Dickensian*, 64:356 (Sept. 1968), pp. 131-140. In this article the authors explain that Dickens "obviously knew that, in order to decide whether a child-witness was competent to give evidence, questions were usually put to the child from the Catechism. Failure to answer them meant that the child was not permitted to take the oath" (131). The significance of this law is played out in Jo's inability to testify at the inquest of Nemo's (Capt. Hawdon) death in the beginning of the novel, causing many to see him as insignificant as a witness and verified citizen.

the meaning of her quest from personal self-knowledge and salvation to patterning the way for the entire nation” (163). Though Stuchebrukhov’s point is to align Esther’s allegorical journey with Biblical allegories and the impact of middle-class Christianity on Victorian England, her theories about Esther as a savior for the middle-class are persuasive, as are the pointed out parallels between Esther and previous Dickensian protagonists.

Within Esther, whose first narrated chapter is titled “A Progress,” readers see the illegitimate birth story played out once more.¹¹ Unfortunately for Esther, however, there is not necessarily a moral character from which she can descend, for her mother is Honoria Barbary, now Honoria Dedlock. Esther is a naturally moral person, much like Oliver and Nell, in spite of her birth to an immoral mother, and Dickens seems to imply through her character that she has made the choice to be her own person and to do the “right” thing. Though her story can grate on the reader’s nerves at times, Esther’s insistence in pointing out her behavior toward others and how others perceive her behavior indicate that she has learned how to live this way on her own (certainly, her aunt did not teach her these values) and teaches readers how to live by example.

When readers meet Esther, she is already a young adult, past the age of adolescence that led to Nell’s death. One reason Esther is allowed to survive is because she had the proper protection of a guardian—even if that guardian was silent and unknown to her. Eventually, John

¹¹ There is, of course, a direct link between the “Progress” of Esther and that of Oliver and Nell before her, both characters which have also been linked directly to John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Barry Qualls includes an analysis of Esther in his book, stating that, much like Oliver and Nell, Esther must come to a sense of self-knowledge, or authenticity, before becoming an icon of the middle class. Her value comes from separating herself from the corrupt systems and people around her—and by acknowledging the truth about herself. Qualls says, “Esther does get free by facing, honestly and ‘naturally,’ the horrid reality about her, and by renouncing self in a way that Lady Dedlock cannot do” (117). He also points out that the two narrators of *Bleak House*, the unnamed one and Esther, “synchronize chaos and order.” These two narrators “come together” in the end in what he calls a final “declaration that the godborn may survive” (121). While I agree that the two narrations work together to show triumph and survival of England, I don’t find it to be a religious argument. Instead, it is an argument about class survival.

Jarndyce reveals to Esther that he has provided for her, saying he had received a letter from her caretaker (later revealed to be her aunt) when Esther was “an orphan girl then twelve years old.” The letter stated that the aunt “had bred her [Esther] in secresy from her birth, had blotted out all trace of her existence” and believed that Esther was “to expiate an offence of which she [Esther] was quite innocent” (254).

Though the “secresy” surrounding Esther’s birth is similar to that which surrounded Oliver’s, her upbringing more importantly marks a key difference between Esther’s character and Nell’s. In fact, it is another reason Esther is allowed to survive her own purifying illness that must strip away any outward charms she might hold over Allan Woodcourt (considering that her background could not be seen as a charm at all). Jarndyce’s intervention in providing for Esther allowed her a security Nell did not have. Whereas Nell had to find ways to provide for herself and her grandfather, taking on a role that she was never meant to have as a female child, Esther does not have these worries and can remain properly feminine.

As a result of a better, though not perfect, upbringing, Esther retains a strong sense of her “Duty” (95), and functions as a mother figure for all those around her without being sexually threatened by corrupt outside influences like Nell. This strength sees her through the necessary illness that leaves her scarred but not broken. Dickens more overtly explains the need for illness in characters like Esther in *Bleak House*. He allows Esther to recount her illness and its outcome, stating:

I lay ill through several weeks,... in...the helplessness and inaction of a sick-room. Before I had been confined to it many days, everything else seemed to have retired into a remote distance where there was little or no separation between the various stages of my life which had been really divided by years. In falling ill, I seemed to have crossed a dark lake and to have left all my experiences, mingled together by the great distance, on the healthy shore. (513)

Esther is shedding the worst “experiences” of the past, and she is able to do so because she is in a secure home at this point in the novel, acting as the official keeper of the keys for Jarndyce.

Esther continues her description, saying that while her mind relived various aspects of her past, she discovered that in life, while she was living during those chaotic times of insecurity as a child and young adult, she “was not only oppressed by cares and difficulties adapted to each station, but by the great perplexity of endlessly trying to reconcile them” (513). The insecurities of her childhood were ignited once more when Esther meets Lady Dedlock and finds out the truth about their relationship. This is a second type of illness that Esther must suffer. Upon the discovery that Lady Dedlock is her mother, Esther rushes home and, “worn out,” she falls asleep only to wake in torment again and taking on her mother’s shame as her own, unable to “disentangle all that was about [her], and [she] felt as if the blame and the shame were all in me, and the visitation had come down” (539).

Esther’s shame results from her ties to an immoral sexual act, something that cuts her parallels with Oliver and strengthens them with Nell. Though in *The Old Curiosity Shop* Nell has not been exposed to circumstances of an immoral birth, the threat of her being involved in such a sexual union of her own is always there, and she cannot cope with the thought that she could become a victim. Esther is not in danger of becoming a victim of an act she commits, but she is willing to suffer—and die—for the sin of her mother. Esther explains, “I was so confused and shaken as to be possessed by a belief that it was right and had been intended that I should die in my birth, and that it was wrong and not intended that I should be then alive” (539). A short time later, Esther, however, reaches the conclusion that she is still capable of independent action. “I saw very well how many things had worked together for my welfare,” she explains, “and that if the sins of the fathers were sometimes visited upon the children, the phrase did not mean what I

had in the morning feared it meant. I knew I was as innocent of my birth as a queen of hers and that before my Heavenly Father I should not be punished for birth nor a queen rewarded for it” (543). In her realization, she knows that she does not have to function as a martyr, as Nell did. Comparing herself to the queen once again brings to the forefront the idea that the middle-class woman has a duty to England that is just as important as the queen’s. The queen, and the nation, has duties, too, only they must choose to act accordingly, just as Esther has done and will do.

In watching her criticism of Richard and in her admiration of Allan, the reader learns, once again, how the population and the country should behave. When Allan proposes to her, there is no delay or frivolity. Instead, Esther says, “I learned in a moment that he loved me. I learned in a moment that my scarred face was all unchanged to him. I learned in a moment that what I had thought was pity and compassion was devoted, generous, faithful love.” He tells her that his “praise is not a lover’s praise, but the truth,” and Esther can rejoice in his love, unlike her mother Honoria, because she is “proud of it, and honoured by it” (866).

Esther’s new worthy position as Allan Woodcourt’s wife allows a new future to be born. Richard, now deceased, has left behind his wife and a son without a father. Though we do not know the outcome of the child, because he is in a secure home with the Woodcourts and his mother, Esther says of his future: “Though to bless and restore his mother, not his father, was the errand of this baby, its power was mighty to do it. When I saw the strength of the weak little hand and how its touch could heal my darling’s heart and raised hope within her, I felt a new sense of the goodness and the tenderness of God” (911). The child is given a moral mission in life, and “hope” for the future is paramount in the ending.

In the end, Esther speaks of her pride in her husband, stating :

We are not rich in the bank, but we have always prospered, and we have quite enough. I never walk out with my husband but I hear the people bless him. I never

go into a house of any degree but I hear his praises or see them in grateful eyes. I never lie down at night but I know that in the course of that day he has alleviated pain and soothed some fellow-creature in the time of need. I know that from the beds of those who were past recovery, thanks have often, often gone up, in the last hour, for his patient ministration. Is not this to be rich? (913)

In their marriage, Allan and Esther “prospered” because they sought to help what was right in front of them. All levels of society are equalized in this moment, for in every “house of any degree,” everyone recognizes the worth of Allan and what he stands for. Allan remains busy, just like his wife, and all of the people he helps are “fellow-creature[s]” rather than the people Mrs. Pardiggle views as scum, the nobodies the Court of Chancery cares little about, the poor children the government moves on, the foreign masses Mrs. Jellyby favors above those suffering directly in front of her, and the millions of other entities and people who do little help those in their own nation. In other words, the fog has lifted, and it is no wonder that Esther is closing her story as she “write[s] early in the morning at [her] summer window” (911).

Ending his novel on a bright and clear summer day, Dickens manages, at least in the confines of the story, to reorganize and rehabilitate England. The country, and the people, have a clear path and positive future ahead once middle-class values are properly installed and guiding England’s population and policies. But security brings more change for the orphan narrative, and the novels of the 1860s show a shift in how authors manipulate the orphan tale begun by Dickens into a story that relates the contemporary problems of the Victorian middle class.

MEN WITHOUT WOMEN: THE DIMINISHING INFLUENCE OF DOMESTICITY
IN *NO NAME* AND *THE SMALL HOUSE AT ALLINGTON*

In the 1860s, as the middle class experiences increasing stability, the discourse of orphanhood begins to shift. Authors (particularly male writers) manipulate the Dickensian orphan narrative, and their end result reveals a changing Victorian world view. Corrupt female characters in these stories do not necessarily die or meet a tragic fate; instead, these women are allowed the opportunity to reform and to marry authentic male characters in the novel—men who are now agents powerful enough to rule society and transform even its most corrupt members into model middle-class citizens.

The transformation of male characters, specifically in later nineteenth-century literature written by men, is noted by Herbert Sussman in *Victorian Masculinities* and John Tosh in *A Man's Place*. Both scholars agree that men are pulling away from the influence of the domestic sphere in the later Victorian era, and Sussman argues a new type of plot—a masculine plot—begins to emerge during this time. The orphan narratives of the later mid-nineteenth century appear slightly before the era of the novels Sussman describes, and they offer an important glimpse into how middle-class standards and values begin to shift.

Sussman explains that, after the mid-nineteenth century, Victorian authors began to associate “bourgeois marriage” with the “sapping of male energy,” an impediment to the development of the ideal man who could contribute to society (5). Tosh also agrees that later in the nineteenth century, men in novels eschew the domestic and the third stage of traditional Victorian masculinity (in which the male achieves his status as a middle-class man by marrying

and carrying the domestic into his public life) in favor of a separation from the home and family life. The “flight from domesticity” was the only way these Victorian males in the latter half of the nineteenth century saw themselves as successful (Tosh 172).

By the 1860s, the comforts of the countryside and the home no longer interested many authors (especially male writers) who instead chose to turn their gaze towards the city and the masculine world of business, and novels begin to lean towards Sussman’s and Tosh’s masculine trajectories. The orphan plot begun in *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* that has been recast over and over again begins to change, and young orphaned male characters begin to abandon all associations with women and their influence. Though each reimagined fate of the orphan surveyed thus far embodied fears about middle-class survival and emphasized gendered and moral responses to these fears, the novels about orphans that appear in the 1860s reveal a paradigmatic shift in this discourse. Authors Wilkie Collins and Anthony Trollope, for example, present orphan narratives revised for a contemporary audience, both authors emphasizing the role of men as superior to that of women.

In the 1862 novel *No Name*, Collins upsets the Dickensian orphan narrative by allowing a corrupt Little Nell not only to survive the narrative, but also to forge a union between herself and an authentic man. The novel’s outcome, contrary to what appears on the surface, is never dependent upon its anti-heroine Magdalen. Unlike the female authors before him who were trying to make a bold statement about women’s potential ability to redeem themselves and be valuable to society in spite of their flawed characters, Collins strips the orphaned and illegitimate Magdalen Vanstone’s success from any ability that she might possess herself. Instead, Collins emphasizes the elevated role of the man, a character no longer dependent upon women or a return to the domestic to ensure his success in life. In *No Name*, the man has the ability to

transform even the most corrupt women, marking the male as the most powerful agent in middle-class society and relegating women to insignificance. Captain Kirke, a half orphan himself, does return to the domestic after making his way in the world, but he sees no danger in taking the formerly corrupt Magdalen as his wife, for he has the power to transform her and keep her in her proper place.

Anthony Trollope, in *The Small House at Allington*, makes a similar revision to the orphan narrative as it began in *Oliver Twist*, but he goes even further than Collins. Though many readers focus on the love story of Lily Dale, *The Small House at Allington* is actually the story of half-orphan Johnny Eames and his quest to become John Eames, a man. Within his depiction of Johnny's path to manhood, Trollope deemphasizes domesticity and marriage as essential stages of masculine development. Instead, Trollope adopts an early version of Sussman's model of the masculine plot, showing that middle-class men must detach themselves completely from the domestic—from not only overbearing mothers but also from marriage itself. Additionally, the earlier Oliver's commitment to enter into the world of mercantilism and commerce is no longer enough to define oneself as a middle-class man; instead, men, Trollope suggests, must sacrifice all in order to dedicate themselves to becoming professionals if they are to succeed in the future.

No Name: Dickens's Little Nell Finally Survives

In 1851, while Dickens composed *A Child's History of England* and *Bleak House*, he began his friendship with and mentorship of Wilkie Collins. From that point onward, Collins often took writing advice from Dickens and allowed the famous author to read and comment upon drafts. Less than a decade after meeting Dickens, Collins wrote what became one of his

most controversial novels: *No Name*. Reviewers offered little praise for the new book, even though it was published only a couple of years after the well-received *The Woman in White*. Ignored by many and appreciated by few, *No Name* actually presents a fascinating interaction between Collins and the Dickensian orphan narrative established in both *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Bleak House*, and his heroine, Magdalen Vanstone, seems a carefully constructed corrupt version of Little Nell. Magdalen does not, however, embody any of Nell's goodness, and the primary complaint against *No Name* is that Collins allows such a female not only to survive but also to find happiness.

At first glance, *No Name* appears to reverse completely the moral system at play within Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*. While in Nell's story Dickens is overly concerned with cultivating domesticity and feminine virtue in order to ensure the middle-class survival, Collins allows Magdalen Vanstone to survive her choice willfully to abandon the home and Victorian morality, even planting the suggestion that she will marry Captain Kirke, have a home of her own, and, eventually, procreate with an authentic man. The move is puzzling, considering that Magdalen's sister, the good and moral Norah, also ends up with a happily-ever-after ending of her own. But perhaps readers are too hasty in their surprise, for Collins, though he does allow Magdalen a positive fate, does not permit the true Vanstone inheritance at stake in the novel ever to fall into her hands.

Collins cannot completely abandon the value of authentic middle-class women carrying on the inherited status and virtues of the middle class, and as revolutionary as Magdalene's tale might seem to readers and as important as it is to the overall statement the novel makes about the middle class, Collins actually upholds the Dickensian orphan narrative while transforming it at the same time. The traditionally authentic and good sister Norah will gain what is most important

(i.e. the inheritance) in the end, which affirms the Dickensian orphan plot. But readers cannot overlook the fact that *No Name* is Magdalen's story, and her tale proves that women who stray from the domestic space do not imperil the Victorian middle class—as long as there is an authentic man to rehabilitate them. Unlike in previous tales of fallen orphaned females, in *No Name* Collins allows an authentic man to have the power to salvage the fallen Magdalen and make her into a productive and proper Victorian woman. Norah's fate proves that the middle class will survive in the end due to its intrinsically superior morality, but Collins also shows that a middle-class Victorian woman who falls from her moral perch is not automatically doomed to death. More importantly, because she is rehabilitated in the end, Magdalen's failure shows that the middle class is more secure than ever, for the authentic middle-class male can rehabilitate and salvage such women without any threat to himself. That Magdalen is saved by an authentic man actually elevates the position of men in the mid-Victorian era, indicating a shift in perception about the importance of the domestic influence upon the world at large and marking *No Name* as an important transition novel during the nineteenth century.

A. Magdalen: Recovering the Fallen Woman

The issue of inheritance provides the central plot focus in *No Name*, and when the illegitimate Vanstone sisters lose their inheritance, the action of the novel commences. Though the fates of both Magdalen and Norah are important to consider, Magdalen's narrative constitutes the majority of the novel. She runs around frantically, trying to gain control of an inheritance that, due to her illegitimate birth, has slipped from her fingers. Her panic resembles that of the middle class as represented in earlier orphan narratives. Collins taps into all of those earlier fears, and he revitalizes the trope of the female wanderer, grossly exaggerating how far the itinerant

female can fall from grace.¹ Magdalen, however, does not end up dead or in a life of prostitution. Instead, she is redeemed, leaving the reader to wonder why Collins would allow such an ending.

The expectations of female characters remained predictable, for the most part, during the late 1850s and into the early 1860s. “Bad” women in novels almost always met a horrid ending, while the virtuous succeeded. Magdalen Vanstone, however, is a startling and unusual female protagonist for the mid-Victorian era. Readers rarely find much to admire in her character even as they are drawn into her story, for she is heartless, opinionated, deceptive, and cruel. Her acts of trickery especially concern readers, as she seems to adopt a different role or affectation on every page, and she embodies the very essence of inauthenticity. Magdalen’s ultimate fate in the novel—not death but instead an implied happy ending—baffled some readers and moved others to anger. As an unidentified reviewer in the November 14, 1863, edition of *The Reader* explained, “How many of the thousands who took almost a personal interest in the fortunes of Magdalen Vanstone, at the time when the question of her Name or No Name was still undecided, would care to sit down now and re-peruse the narrative of her adventures, knowing, as they do, what the end is to be[?]” (564) Others went further, calling Magdalen a “perverse heroine” who, in spite of committing “wrongs and [her] strong desire to right a cruel injustice caused by her and her sister’s illegitimacy,” was “led...into crime, falsehood, imposture, to the verge of theft even,” yet she is “let off with a punishment gentle in proportion to the unscrupulous selfishness of her character” (*The Athenaeum* 10). In *The Athenaeum*, a critic despised Magdalen in particular

¹ Wilkie Collins links Magdalen with wandering heroines of past novels by heightening the outrageous measures Magdalen attempts to secure a home, a name, and an inheritance. In *Wilkie Collins: Women, Property & Propriety*, Philip O’Neill argues, “When Magdalen Vanstone discovers that, in the eyes of the law, she has no name, that she is a character, an individual but not a legal subject, her role in society becomes problematic” (158). He states, “A condition of no-name suggests chaos and anarchy, a complete lack of social ordering and control” (153). Her “chao[ti]c” wandering is much like Nell’s, only now it is taken to extremes, pushing the boundaries of what Victorian audiences will tolerate.

because she cannot ever be seen as a worthy heroine. Magdalen's "persistence in her evil purposes can only be explained by admitting that there existed in the heroine's character hard and (we repeat) coarse elements, which deprive her of our sympathy." The reviewer especially takes issue with the ending, stating:

It is true that she fails, lamentably; that she does all but pay the penalty of her recklessness with her life: but this is to bring about her regeneration, in the love of an honest and nobly-natured man, who suddenly appears for her rescue at the moment when she is over the edge of the precipice. Supposing such a change possible—supposing such a return from willful and hardening guilt to those habits of mind and feeling which make an honest woman worthy of an honest man could be,—it is here disproportionately abrupt. (11)

Indeed, Magdalen appears to be inauthentic and foolhardy throughout most of the narrative, and many nineteenth-century readers were disgusted by her actions, lamenting that *No Name* seemed to be a novel that "was too unreal to have a moral" (*The Reader*, 15). But Collins sought to try something new with Magdalen's character, and she achieved what so many of her predecessors could not: survival.

Collins appears to be most concerned with how to construct a story in which a corrupt woman can be redeemed and survive—and not only survive but also enjoy middle-class life after her redemption. The question had been taken up before by both Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, but the attempts of both authors to allow their wandering (and, therefore, fallen) heroines to survive failed—a fate considered proper considering how much angst was expressed by the middle class over whether or not they could survive as a group into the future—especially if the women (and, therefore, the domestic) became tainted. Collins's attempt to revise the fate of the fallen Victorian woman, and, indeed, the fate of the fallen female Victorian orphan, reveal a subtle shift in how mid-nineteenth-century British society viewed the role of women. Previous novels uncover a middle-class

dialogue about the importance of women remaining pure and close to home as a crucial factor in preserving the middle-class and its rising influence. But in *No Name*, Collins suggests that the middle class will survive even if its women fall—as long as they can be redeemed.

His belief that fallen women can be restored to proper middle-class females is strongly related to the time in which he wrote his novel, and Collins wastes no time in proposing that readers prepare themselves for such an outcome. He opens the novel with a plea to readers to accept that such a fate for a fallen woman is possible:

THE main purpose of this story is to appeal to the reader's interest in a subject which has been the theme of some of the greatest writers, living and dead—but which has never been, and can never be, exhausted, because it is a subject eternally interesting to all mankind. Here is one more book that depicts the struggle of a human creature, under those opposing influences of Good and Evil, which we have all felt, which we have all known. It has been my aim to make the character of "Magdalen," which personifies this struggle, a pathetic character even in its perversity and its error; and I have tried hard to attain this result by the least obtrusive and the least artificial of all means—by a resolute adherence throughout to the truth as it is in Nature. This design was no easy one to accomplish; and it has been a great encouragement to me (during the publication of my story in its periodical form) to know, on the authority of many readers, that the object which I had proposed to myself, I might, in some degree, consider as an object achieved.
(5)

From the start, Collins admits that he set out to create a story of redemption for the fallen woman. He makes his goals even more transparent by naming his unlikely protagonist “Magdalen,” a name which evokes contrasting images of corrupt sexuality and divine redemption all at once (in spite of the lack of Biblical evidence for this interpretation of Mary Magdalen’s character). Victorian readers would have immediately picked up on the reference, of course. Collins’s decision to name his character Magdalen during the early 1860s appears to be no accident and served as a shrewd choice that helped his readers prepare for his new literary agenda.

The concept of the fallen woman began to change in the 1860s from what it was when Dickens wrote *The Old Curiosity Shop*, a novel composed during the same decade he helped found Urania Cottage, a house of reform for women of ill repute. Though at that time he and others like him sought to reform prostitutes and fallen women, they still considered the disgraced woman to be separate from the ideal middle-class woman. Fallen women were a “class of persons” to be trained out of vice, he believed, and he took careful measures to control and monitor the women selected to benefit from the charitable home (*Letters* 554). By the 1860s, however, more compassion greeted those women who had “fallen” into lives of prostitution or exhibited loose sexual morals.

During the early 1860s, a curious social movement developed in England. Deborah Logan points out in her essay “An ‘Outstretched Hand to the Fallen’: *The Magdalen’s Friend* and the Victorian Reclamation Movement” that the movement, called “Magdalenism,” began to grow as a result of the publication of *The Magdalen’s Friend*, a “monthly periodical published between 1860-1864, [which] offers insight into a relatively obscure chapter in the history of British feminism” (125). Collins, of course, begins to publish *No Name* in 1862 in Dickens’s *All the Year ‘Round*, and his decision to name his protagonist Magdalen, giving her all the qualities of Dickens’s (and other Victorian authors’) fallen women while allowing her a positive fate, appears to directly correspond with the Magdalenism movement. Rather than allowing his female character to die, Collins offers the hope inspired by Magdalenists that “Christ-like compassion, rather than condemnation, [should be given] toward the fallen” (126). Like the periodical, Collins’s Magdalen Vanstone “transgress[es] boundaries...[of] class, gender, and ideol[ogy]” (126) and operates under the “basic premise” that “women can and do atone for their mistakes” (130). Collins “refuses to condemn fallen women,” marking a distinctive change in

middle-class Victorian perspective (138). Though the portrayal of the immoral or wandering woman in stories of the 1830s through the 1850s seemed to indicate that not only will future generations fall but that society would fall also due to her behavior, in the 1860s this idea begins to adjust to new ways of thinking—and in few books is there a better example of the fallen woman redeemed than in Collins's *No Name*. Additionally, just as in the biblical story in which Magdalen finds salvation through the male Christ, in *No Name* the fallen Magdalen finds her own redemption at the hands of the authentic Captain Robert Kirke.

Though the Magdalenism movement was spawned through religious activism, Collins does not mention religion in his preface. Instead, he focuses on the concept of his goal: to present a typically hopeless and fallen character according to her true self—"the truth as it is in Nature" (5). In other words, Collins seems to indicate that human nature can sometimes necessarily override morality and the appearance of authenticity, but the situations which occasion such a shift from accepted behavior make a person no less authentic. Magdalen's basic nature is one that runs contrary to accepted Victorian female behavior, and, indeed, her gradual adoption of disguise appears on the surface to indicate a complete descent into inauthenticity. But one must always remember that Magdalen has a single goal: to restore her inheritance to herself and her sister—to define them as authentic and legitimate in society. The obsession with inheritance is a familiar theme in the Dickensian orphan story, and Collins complicates its importance. Magdalen is on a quest to reclaim her inheritance; as a fallen woman, however, she also is on a separate mission to regain her middle-class inheritance, seeking to take back what so many other fallen Victorian heroines have lost in the course of their authors' plots.

As shown throughout this study, each failed version of little Nell reincarnated thus far has faced death or, at least as in the case of Sally Brass, a life of degradation. Catherine Earnshaw,

Maggie Tulliver, and Lady Honoria Dedlock all served as warnings: a wandering female who reaches sexual maturity, who also is orphaned symbolically or in fact, necessarily must die to restore order to the plot and the Victorian middle-class world view. In the case of *No Name*, however, readers confront a new version of Nell, one so corrupted that she morphs into frightening and unrecognizable versions of herself before committing an actual leap into a sexual union with her cousin, Noel Vanstone, that potentially places her life, and the genetic legacies of entire families, at risk.

In order to create a fallen female that can be redeemed, Collins builds upon models that came before, engaging in a literary conversation about orphanhood, class, and gender roles. By centering his novel around the corrupt Magdalen, however, Collins also engages all of the complications embedded in the female orphan narrative, and Magdalen is a strange combination of those characters who came before her. Just as with Eliot's young Maggie Tulliver, readers immediately recognize that Magdalen presents a problem as a female character in a novel that begins in what appears to be a solid domestic world, complete with a father and mother who love her and who provide every necessity and want she could possibly have. Magdalen, like Maggie and even Catherine Earnshaw, however, is marked as noticeably different from the beginning of the novel. She looks nothing like her family and violates every rule of proper Victorian femininity. The narrator explains everyone's puzzled reaction to Magdalen's contradictory existence, stating, "By one of those strange caprices of Nature, which science leaves still unexplained, the youngest of Mr. Vanstone's children presented no recognizable resemblance to either of her parents. How had she come by her hair? How had she come by her eyes? Even her father and mother had asked themselves those questions, as she grew up to girlhood, and had been sorely perplexed to answer them" (13). Nothing like her sister Norah, Magdalen almost

appears to be a changeling, but this, too, is one of Collins's attempts to exaggerate the earlier Dickensian orphan stories in order to make his eventual point.²

Early in the novel, the narrator reveals that Magdalen is the second illegitimate child born out of wedlock to "Mr. and Mrs. Vanstone," but unlike Oliver Twist, who resembled his parents and inherited their goodness and morality even though he was born illegitimate, Magdalen represents the unrepentant action doubled. She is of a different species almost, so unlike her parents—so unpredictable and uncontrolled—but frightening in her influence. Magdalen's difference creates a dangerous autonomy, like the young Maggie Tulliver's difference made her both powerful and frightening. Magdalen's similarities with Maggie Tulliver are especially obvious in the easily won control that she exercises over people around her, especially her father, who the narrator in *No Name* says bows to Magdalen's petting as if he were a "Newfoundland dog, and was made to be romped with at his daughter's convenience" (16). Readers of earlier novels would find it hard to trust Magdalen from the outset, for females who so clearly violate accepted standards of behavior and who have the ability to control and influence men are the most threatening. The narrator also heightens Magdalen's increasing danger as a character by immediately acknowledging her sexual power and the potential for it to become her ruin, explaining that her name is one associated with a fallen Biblical woman:

² In "'There Is no Friend Like a Sister': Sisterhood as Sexual Difference," Helena Michie argues, "*No Name* makes sisterhood into a spectacle. Throughout the novel, characters and readers alike are invited to compare the two sister-heroines and to draw first the excitement and then the moral of the tale from the contrast between them" (408). This "spectacle" is especially highlighted in how Collins represents genetic difference between the two girls. Michie says, "Discordance and self-contradiction inhabit Magdalen's body; while her physical contrast to her sister will be emphasized later in the novel, we can read Magdalen's body...[as a] carefully staged entrance for signs of the multiple women already at work and at play within it" (410). Collins forces readers to examine the multiple personalities and outcomes for women in *No Name*, mimicking, in some ways, the cataloging and categorization so popular during the nineteenth century.

Magdalen! Surely, the grand old Bible name—suggestive of a sad and somber dignity; recalling, in its first association, mournful ideas of penitence and seclusion—had been here, as events had turned out, inappropriately bestowed? Surely, this self-contradictory girl had perversely accomplished one contradiction more, by developing into a character which was out of all harmony with her own Christian name! (15)

The proposal here is that perhaps this literary Magdalen is unrepentant now and will not repent in the future; instead, the author indicates that she will fall into such a horrific disgrace that she would not live up to the model of penance and redemption of her namesake—that she would be “out of all harmony with her own Christian name.”

In the beginning and throughout most of the novel, Magdalen appears to be far from penitent and her behavior is often depicted as scandalous. She thrives on being “self-contradictory”—in other words, she goes against whatever might naturally be a good part of her nature (15). When readers first encounter Magdalen, she is described as moving with “light, rapid footsteps” and then appears “with the suddenness of a flash of light” (13). The reader suspects that the narrator is preparing them to meet a rambunctious child, yet Magdalen is fully grown and should be behaving with more decorum. Most disturbing, however, is her attention to the dramatic arts, and early in the novel she reveals a love of acting, the epitome of inauthenticity. Magdalen acts various parts from the start, but she emerges as a literal actress in a first private performance for family and friends (and she will later take to the stage professionally once she discovers her illegitimacy).

In predictable form, Magdalen’s insistence upon being an actress is directly linked with her descent into inauthenticity, to the point that she no longer realizes who she is or what her position is in the world. Nearly every relationship she has in the novel is one based upon a role she must play. With men, this role is almost always sexualized. For example, when she asks her

father's permission to act for the first time in "private theatricals," Magdalen cajoles him and winningly pouts her way into approval of her desire:

"‘The Rivals’ is the play, papa—‘The Rivals,’ by the famous what’s-his-name—and they want ME to act! The one thing in the whole universe that I long to do most. It all depends on you. Mamma shakes her head; and Miss Garth looks daggers; and Norah's as sulky as usual—but if you say Yes, they must all three give way and let me do as I like. Say Yes," she pleaded, nestling softly up to her father, and pressing her lips with a fond gentleness to his ear, as she whispered the next words. "Say Yes, and I'll be a good girl for the rest of my life." (43-44)

The moment is typical of many children with their parents, but Magdalen knows exactly what she is doing as a young woman in her late teens. She appeals to her father through feminine flirtation, "nestling softly up to her father," "pressing her lips with a fond gentleness to his ear," and "whisper[ing]" to him. She is also noted as using "seductive, serpentine grace" to seduce Francis (Frank) Clare, a description that later equates her with the equally serpentine Noel Vanstone (45).

Magdalen's association with sexuality and Biblical metaphor emphasize her relationship with Mary Magdalen, but upon the death of her parents, she is cast out into the world without any type of role and invents multiple identities for herself. Collins's emphasis of Magdalen's corrupt characteristics increases with dramatic intensity once she becomes orphaned, almost a caricatured performance of the anxiety revealed in earlier orphan narratives when female characters fall from their moral pedestal due to both the perils of orphanhood and the wandering that tends to ensue as they are forced to seek a suitable home. Magdalen's story is even more shocking, however, because rather than clinging to her sister and their governess after her parents' deaths, she willingly abandons all ties to home and the family. Her actions force readers immediately to confront the stereotyped female orphan narrative that indicates that, especially

for middle-class women of unstable character, orphanhood propels them toward a life of degradation.³

By allowing Magdalen to force herself out of the middle class and spiral into an immoral lifestyle upon being orphaned, and giving her the ability to leave her sister and governess, Collins speaks to and heightens the middle-class fears about long-term survival, which are expressed in orphan narratives of the past. But unlike the narratives of the past, Collins has assured readers from the beginning that Magdalen's fate is secure and that order will be restored. He uses the pattern of previous novels to bring about Magdalen's redemption, but to turn her from a Catherine Earnshaw into an Esther Summerson, Collins must find a way to make her transformation possible.

To do this, Collins returns to the tried and true method of recovery for so many Dickensian orphans: illness. Like Oliver, Nell, and Esther before her, Magdalen must also experience a purifying illness. Magdalen's diseased state, however, functions differently in *No Name* than it does in other novels. Previously, an orphaned character who had been tainted by the world would experience an illness and spontaneously emerge transformed or die. In *No Name*, however, the illness only prepares Magdalen for restoration. The power to transform herself from within is stripped from her in this novel, and her redemption can only occur with the assistance of an authentic middle-class man. Redemption, however, does not mean that Magdalen secures her place in society as a Vanstone. Though Collins's tale of Magdalen will be a contemporary

³ Wilkie Collins, like Charles Dickens and Emily Brontë before him, also employs Gothic devices to increase the anxiety generated by Magdalen's story. In *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*, Tamar Heller reveals, "Collins often portrays women and other outcasts who have no 'character,' because of either their gender or their ambiguous class status (or both, as with the illegitimate daughter who is the central figure in *No Name*). This characterlessness is troped not just through femininity but through a sexually fallen femininity" (84). The same description could be applied to Oliver, Nell, Heathcliff, Cathy, Esther, Lady Dedlock, etc.

expression of change and reform, the ideal of the pure Victorian woman as England's best possible model of authenticity and femininity is not dead in his story. Norah Vanstone, who constantly and quietly occupies action taking place outside of Magdalen's narrative, ultimately will be the one to restore her family's inheritance even though both she and her sister survive the novel.

B. Norah: A Good Woman's Rightful Inheritance

Though Magdalen will recover due to the guidance and presence of an authentic man, Collins cannot allow her to be the vessel of the Vanstone legacy and inheritance. Collins presents two versions of Victorian women in his novel—the virtuous sister, Norah, and the corrupt Magdalen. Through the development of Norah's story, Collins reaffirms the Dickensian orphan narrative and assures readers that if the middle class simply will stay the course in times of distress, its future and inheritance will never be at risk. In portraying Norah as Magdalen's opposite, Collins gives himself the ability to set up a character who, though she does not dominate the narrative, represents traditional Victorian female virtue and authenticity. He fashions her after her Dickensian predecessors, and like *Oliver Twist* and *Esther Summerson*, Norah is full of goodness (her name means 'honor') in spite of her illegitimacy. After her parents' death, she keeps her focus steadily on family and living a quiet life of stability. Unlike her sister, Norah will never stray far from her ties to home, quietly accepting her fate and doing what she can to redeem herself by behaving according to accepted norms and an inborn sense of morality and authenticity.

From the beginning of the novel, readers recognize that Norah is the traditional model Victorian female. Even when her parents' judgment is clearly lacking, Norah remains the voice

of morality, especially in regard to her sister's often outrageous behavior. The narrator makes a special point of telling readers, "The example [of how to react to Magdalen...was] set by the master of the house...[and] followed at once by the family—with the solitary exception of Norah, whose incurable formality and reserve expressed themselves, not too graciously" (42). Considering her family's relaxed attitude towards Magdalen's faulty character, it remains somewhat of a mystery as to where Norah attained her moral outlook. The most logical answer seems to be that she simply was born good.

Like *Oliver Twist*, who never had a model to impart goodness into his life, Norah seems to embody a type of goodness that comes naturally to her. If the example of *Oliver Twist* (and Esther, later) is any indication, a child born out of wedlock to a couple sharing deep love can be good and worthy. Additionally, Miss Garth, the children's governess, emerges as an authentic character as the novel proceeds, and she remains especially close to Norah throughout the story. Norah's affiliation with Miss Garth makes sense, because, as shown in other novels, authentic characters must necessarily pair with other authentic characters. Miss Garth comes to see Norah as the better sister quite early in the novel, never abandoning her loyalty to the girl from that point forward. When Miss Garth recognizes that Norah has correctly judged the lackluster Frank Clare, Magdalen's first unfit suitor, the narrator explains the governess's reaction, stating, "Norah's warning words, addressed to Mrs. Vanstone in the garden, now, for the first time, [made] the idea dawn[n] on her that Norah had seen the consequences in their true light" (66). The association of "tru[th]" with Norah begins in this moment for Miss Garth and the reader, and it is carried through to the end of the novel. From this point forward, the reader notices that Norah "ke[eps] her position" (70) and "never change[s]" (71) in her stance against her sister's

actions. All of Magdalen's cajoling and caressing cannot shift Norah's opinion, a strong signal to the reader that Norah, all along, has been the only person to see her sister for who she really is.

Because she never wavers, Norah's fate as the model of Victorian femininity, authenticity, and domesticity is secure, even though she must endure hardships. While Magdalen falls further and further into degradation throughout the novel and wanders far from home upon the death of her parents, Norah quietly accepts her fate. She becomes an angel of redemption, which parallels Esther Summerson's role as such a character in *Bleak House*. Just as Esther hopes to provide care for those ailing around her, guiding them towards the right path, Norah also hopes to guide Magdalen, pleading with her sister to reveal her whereabouts and trying to bring her back to the safety of home when Magdalen is living in disguise. She hopes that Magdalen will send "only one line to tell me where I can find you," and Norah's full happiness can only be realized after her sister has been brought to see light and truth (316). Norah's attempts do bring Magdalen to her senses at times but are never truly successful, for Collins seems to have thought that only the authentic man can bring a fallen woman to redemption. Norah's failure to bring her sister into the light should not be seen as a shortcoming, however. Instead, it is simply another signal that this is a novel representative of a time period in flux. Norah's character has purpose, for though she is an unsuccessful "friend" of Magdalen, she does provide the traditional model of femininity and morality for Magdalen and the reader. She is another reincarnation of Esther Summerson, unfailingly industrious in accepting her fate and rewarded in the end for doing so.

Norah's letter announcing her marriage arrives at Magdalen's sickbed as she recovers. Revealing that she has married George Bartram, who, upon Noel Vanstone's death inherited the Vanstone fortune, Norah becomes the sister restored to her rightful place in society. Collins's

message is clear: fears of middle-class survival or the concern that potential heirs might be refused inheritance because they are illegitimate need not be so frightening. Norah, holding to tradition and steady devotion to authenticity and morality, wins in the end—just as the middle class will do if it continues along its steady path. Even Magdalen internalizes this lesson at the end of the novel. Her recognition that Norah's pathway has been best partially comes from Magdalen's own insight, but it is significant that she recognizes this while under the care of Kirke.

C. Captain Kirke: Male Authenticity Saves the Day

As an authentic character in a novel filled with imposters, Robert Kirke presents a very different model of masculinity in *No Name* from that of the lazy Frank Clare and the trickster Horatio Wragge, instead reminding readers of Dickens's Allan Woodcourt in *Bleak House*. He appears briefly in the first third of the novel, disappears into the empire for a long time, emerges as hero at the end of the novel, and saves Magdalen from certain death and from her immoral lifestyle. Kirke's reaction to Magdalen is consistently strong, from his brief meeting in the earlier portions of the story to the moment he rediscovers her dying in the street. It is important, however, to note that Kirke does not pursue Magdalen until the end of the novel. Collins does not allow Kirke to have extensive contact with Magdalen until he has proven himself away from home and become an authentic man. Before he can fulfill his necessary role as redeemer, he must be in complete control of himself. Like Allan Woodcourt, he leaves England and goes off into the Empire, where he cultivates his masculinity and his fortune. When he returns, his stable power as a middle-class Englishman is unquestionable, and he can then act as a proper guide for Magdalen's transformation.

When readers first encounter Kirke, Collins simply refers to him as “Mr.” Kirke, a man with a “weather-beaten face [that] was accustomed to no concealments” (346). The narrator reveals Kirke’s sister’s impressions of Kirke’s character, which has always been moral and authentic, stating:

From his boyhood upward she [Kirke’s sister] had always been accustomed to see him master of himself. Years since, in the failing fortunes of the family, he had been their example and their support. She had heard of him in the desperate emergencies of a life at sea, when hundreds of his fellow-creatures had looked to his steady self-possession for rescue from close-threatening death—and had not looked in vain. Never, in all her life before, had his sister seen the balance of that calm and equal mind lost as she saw it lost now. (347)

The passage is important in that it quickly relates that Kirke, like Oliver, Kit, and Allan before him, had always maintained dedication to authenticity—even from “boyhood.” As an adult man in a family without parents, he is the guide for all, the one who maintains a “steady self-possession.” The description appears before Kirke ventures out into the empire and shortly after his first encounter with Magdalen. Because his masculine development is not complete, the presence of Magdalen makes him lose “the balance of that calm and equal mind.” There is no choice at this point in the plot except to force Kirke out of it. “Mr.” Kirke must leave England and become a man.

When he returns from abroad on the “merchantman *Deliverance*,” he emerges in the novel as “Captain” Kirke, a man with unshakable authenticity and authority (696). His “weather-beaten” face is sunburned (like Woodcourt’s) from honest effort to make his fortune as an Englishman in the Empire. Almost immediately upon his return, Kirke discovers Magdalen ill and dying in the streets, promptly takes possession of her, and, as a result, propels her into an amazing transformation. From the moment she feels the authentic Kirke’s touch, Magdalen reverts to a childlike state of mind. This return to childhood, complete with a delirious vision of

Kirke as her father, allows Magdalen to be reborn with the presence of an appropriately authentic male—something she was deprived of at her actual birth.⁴ As kind as Mr. Vanstone was, he was always a man harboring a secret. Kirke kept no secrets, and he would provide redemption and “deliverance” for Magdalen. Under his influence, she begins to see things more clearly and suddenly begins to long for the authentic man in a way previously foreign to her.

The narrator explains her reaction to Kirke’s influence, stating, “Thoughts which had never risen in her mind yet, rose in it now.” Magdalen realizes that only the authentic and moral reap rewards, and the knowledge is like a “light of . . . overwhelming discovery” (725). Suddenly, she is more strongly pulled toward Kirke than she ever had been before, and she develops a “nobler sense” and feels a “growth of gratitude to the man who had saved her [life].”

Intriguingly, all traces of darkness and inauthenticity are taken from Magdalen’s description from this point onward, and Collins’s narrator says that after her awakening everything became “clearer and clearer” for her (726). Naturally, from this moment forward, Magdalen, as a false woman who has become authentic, seeks her authentic mate, Captain Kirke, in earnest. The moment is especially interesting in how it reverses the scenario played out in *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, or even *Bleak House*, novels in which there are instances of men falling ill only fully to recover under the influence of women. Additionally, the women who recover from illness in those novels do so in a secure domestic environment while they, too, are under a

⁴ In “A Victim in Search of a Torturer: Reading Masochism in Wilkie Collins’s *No Name*,” Anna Jones argues that Magdalen’s attraction to Kirke at the end of the novel is linked to her masochistic desires to punish herself. “In Kirke we have an amalgamation of the dead father (for whom she mistakes Kirke in the delirium of her fever) and the object of desire, Frank” (208). Certainly, Magdalen does make a point to confess to him and reveal all of her sins. In the end, both Jones’s reading and mine validate Collins’s decision to make the male character the focus of salvation.

woman's care. In *No Name*, however, the situation is reversed, and Collins gives the male the power to heal and transform the diseased female.

Upon Magdalen's recovery, she realizes that Kirke is her moral salvation, much like Dick Swiveller realized that the Marchioness had the power to transform him. As she heals, Kirke tells her stories of his adventures at sea, and Magdalen is most attracted to "[h]is noble unconscious" accounts "of his own heroism—the artless modesty with which he described his own acts of dauntless endurance and devoted courage, without an idea that they were anything more than plain acts of duty to which he was bound by the vocation that he followed." Her attraction for Kirke grows from simply sexual attraction (which she acknowledges early on) to an admiration of his character. Through the stories of his life, she "raised him to a place in her estimation so hopelessly high above her that she became uneasy and impatient until she had pulled down the idol again which she herself had set up" (720). Magdalen slowly learns from his influence and falls in love with him. By the end of the novel, Magdalen is no longer attempting to engage in disguise. Instead, she begs Kirke to "[t]ell [her] the truth" (741), and the phrase "the truth" is repeatedly used in the last few chapters. He does so with a kiss, and the novel ends.

Even though Magdalen's narrative appears to be subversive and shocking (and, no doubt, it was), the lesson of the novel is quite traditional. At the same time, however, the position of women in the middle-class orphan narrative shifts to one of less importance. Collins makes clear that Magdalen's fallen status is not a threat to anyone—not to Norah, because the Vanstone inheritance is secure, and not to Kirke, who has the power to be authentic with or without a proper middle-class woman and pure domestic space. Kirke's role is the most important, and as the 1860s continues, the trend of privileging the male narrative becomes more obvious, while the middle-class story turns from the domestic to the masculine.

The Small House at Allington: The Professional Man

Though Collins rewrites the Dickensian orphan narrative and creates a scenario in which the authentic man rehabilitates the fallen woman, his story ultimately confirms traditional mid-century Victorian values. One cannot fail to notice the diminishing importance of women and the pure domestic sphere in a novel like *No Name*, however, and in the later years of the nineteenth century, novelists began to abandon the domestic novel of the past and shift their gaze to a male dominated contemporary society. The concerns of the middle class as portrayed through the Dickensian orphan narrative of the past are no longer relevant. But the secure position of the middle class and its members creates a new concern: how does one accomplish standing out among the masses?

In a class built upon legitimizing itself not only through morality and authenticity but also through commercial success, the middle-class male's goals began to change. He sought to better himself and make an esteemed place for himself within the entire class, and he hopes to accomplish this through professionalization. The middle-class orphan plot of the later nineteenth century, therefore, is increasingly masculine. Gone are the comforting unions between public and private life with a pure domestic angel at the center to provide a novel's moral purpose or determine a character's fate. Instead, the orphan's progress in later mid-century novels becomes the survival of the individual middle-class male in a male-dominated business world that is permanently and securely in the hands of the middle class. Proving one's masculinity is still governed by displaying authenticity, but the trajectory of the middle-class man's life changes from that which Tosh describes early on in *A Man's Place*.

Tosh's first two stages of masculine life remain basically unchanged in these later novels: the young man spends his early years under the influence of the domestic and then leaves eventually to pursue his education and apprenticeship in the business world (i.e. the world of men). As shown, however, the ultimate goal earlier in the Victorian era was the return of the man to the domestic, that safe haven that ensured his ability to retain authenticity in the public world of business. In later novels of the nineteenth century, however, this pattern begins to change. The childhood domestic becomes an impediment to men as they try to achieve success in the business world—the place that now secures their place in society and future middle-class dominance. Returning to the domestic through marriage is optional at best in these later stories, for the orphan protagonist standing in for the middle class makes clear that true authenticity and masculinity can only be achieved by leaving the female world behind altogether. Marriage is no longer the goal; it is disposable in a society whose members now seek validation less through a moral cause and more through financial dominance.

This shift to a male-dominated plot foreshadows Herbert Sussman's theory about the "masculine plots" that emphasized male celibacy as an ideal pathway to artistic achievement. Speaking about the figure of the monk who appears in works by Robert Browning and Walter Pater, Sussman explains the allure of the male environment for writers and artists of the mid- to late Victorian era. "Bourgeois industrial manhood," he says, "defines manliness as success within the male sphere, the new arena of commerce and technology in which sexual energy is transmuted into constructive labor" (4). The monastic life, which is closely akin to the male world of business, allows for greater expression of male talents—an "imaginative zone" in which men can exist solely to produce rather than being forced into "compulsory" unions with women (5).

Though Sussman speaks about male artists “channeling desexualized desire into art production,” the same theory can be applied to the Victorian business world—a male environment that, by the 1860s, was becoming flooded by a mass of indistinguishable workers. Businesses were well established by this point, and the world looked very different from *Oliver Twist*’s. Entrepreneurship is no longer good enough. Making one’s way in the world during the 1860s and beyond required something more: professionalism. To become a professional, however, requires dedication and energy, and the distraction of women hampers male progress. Like Sussman’s monk, the men with aspirations to become professionals had to change their value system. As a result, the Dickensian orphan narrative undergoes a radical transformation.

Professionalism as an ideal is deeply rooted in the quest for authenticity, and this is one strong link later mid-century novels maintain with the Dickensian narratives of the past. Burton J. Bledstein, author of *Culture in Professionalism*, explains that professionalism embodies both morality and authenticity:

In the service of mankind—the highest ideal—the professional resisted all corporate encroachments and regulations upon his independence, whether from government bureaucrats, university trustees, business administrators, public laymen, or even his own professional associations. The culture of professionalism released the creative energies of the free person who was usually accountable only to himself and his personal interpretation of the ethical standards of his profession. (92)

Much like Sussman’s ideas about heroes who engage in later nineteenth-century masculine plots, the professional exists in an all-male world. He achieves his authenticity from his actions in the workplace rather than his experience with the domestic. In fact, there is no room for women in this “culture of professionalism.” The emphasis on men necessarily changes the Victorian novel, as Susan Colón suggests in *The Professional Ideal in the Victorian Novel*. Colón maintains that Trollope exemplifies this shift in storytelling, and she specifically explores his ideas about

professionalism among the clergy in one of her early chapters. One of her larger points, however, is that his “fiction also makes apparent that ‘manly independence’ is emphatically a privilege and responsibility exercised by men,” indicating that some later Victorian authors abandoned domesticity for novelistic worlds built upon male society and professionalization (57).

The change to a masculine-dominated plot about professionalization still serves the goals of the middle class. Just as in earlier novels, authors continue to show that morality and authenticity are the cornerstones of middle-class society and its continued influence. In fact, many saw professionalism as the most attractive way for the middle class to maintain power and for society to progress efficiently. As one author in *The London Review* explained, “[A]lmost any profession...is good enough as an instrument of moral and intellectual cultivation. One-sided progress is better than many-sided and stationary dilettantism” (“Professional Character” 13). The professional is the man of the future—and men are the future of England.

Readers witness a strong example of this transformation from domestic oriented plots to the professional plot in Anthony Trollope’s *The Small House at Allington* (1864). Just as when it was published, readers today erroneously immerse themselves into Trollope’s description of Lily Dale’s tragic love life. When the novel appeared, readers expressed outrage that Trollope did not allow Lily a happy ending, refusing to understand why she could not end up with Johnny Eames, the man who truly loved her. If readers retreat from the emotional side of the novel, however, they easily see that Trollope never intended for readers to focus on Lily and her melodramatic tale. Instead, he wanted readers to pay attention to Johnny Eames, an updated *Oliver Twist* who makes a new kind of progress in a modern world.

The story of men actually makes up most of the novel, but readers, trained to invest in emotional, moral domestic narratives of the past, succumb to the Allington narrative and the

tragic love life of Lily, a woman who in the end remains in the same position in the novel in which she began, refusing to move into the future, adamantly clinging to the past. Eames's journey to manhood is what actually moves the plot forward—his path from being a “hobbledehoy” to becoming a professional in the middle-class business world. Eames's story represents a strong shift in the orphan narrative begun by Dickens in how it develops towards a masculine narrative of professionalization. Half-orphan Johnny Eames, a child-man ruled by women, must learn to break free of them and the Victorian past centered around domesticity, emerging from the world of the “hobbledehoy” into public recognition as a professional. In this rewritten version of *Oliver Twist*, Trollope indicates that men must abandon the society of women for good if they hope to succeed in the world and continue middle-class dominance.

A. Johnny Eames: The Hobbledehoy's Progress

Though his story will be continued in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, Trollope never changes Johnny Eames's outcome, nor does he stray from the idea that if the middle class hopes to continue its prosperity it must leave women and the domestic behind. The virtues of morality and authenticity are not abandoned, but Trollope masculinizes them and insists that a true man must cultivate and display authenticity as it is appropriate for the business world and separate from the domestic sphere. Trollope obviously tries to maneuver the focus of the novel away from the countryside and women to the city and men. His new model of proper masculinity champions his professional identity and the authentic self far from the women who stand as models of domestic angels. As in past novels, men must break with the home life and women from their childhood, but Trollope indicates that now they must also abandon the home and marriage if they

want to achieve success in the world. In this decision, readers witness Trollope advancing a new type of masculine development and plot, signaling a new era in the Victorian age.

The essence of *Oliver Twist* exists in a character like Johnny Eames only in the most basic story of how a Victorian man manifests masculinity. Though Oliver must adopt a career and succeed in business in order to support a family, he need not develop expertise in his field as those do who seek to be professionals in later Victorian novels. The role of the professional takes the place of middle-class entrepreneurship and employment, and the only way to succeed as a professional is to throw one's entire self into the process. Becoming a professional in one's chosen field of work begins to emerge as the defining factor of manhood and authenticity in the 1860s, and those male characters who adapt to this shift in world view achieve success no matter how horrible their domestic life may be. If the men of *The Small House at Allington* are to be considered models of manhood, they must place all of their attention in the public forum of the city and direct all of their energy towards solidifying their place there as a marked professional rather than securing a place in the home.

In *The Rise of the Professional Society*, Harold Perkin notes that though much of the early and early-mid-nineteenth century English based its "ideal[s]" on aspects of behavior resulting from values present due to Industrialism, he says that "[t]he professional ideal" was "based on trained expertise and selection by merit" (4). Also inferred is that the domestic and social novels which emerged during the earlier decades of the Victorian era embraced values—moral values, especially—that were vastly different from those at stake in the novel about the professional. *The Small House at Allington* is an early expression of this new society that strays from traditional concepts of Victorian morality, but the novel also is an important example of how the Victorian world view was changing. Adopting the path of the professional necessarily

demands a lack of attention to family and home life for later Victorian men, and their paths sway far from the domestic and into the new masculine domestic: the urban office.

Through Johnny Eames, Trollope allows readers to see the old world clashing with the new. At the beginning of the novel, Eames is secured in the countryside of Allington, a place that remains unchanging and represents a pastoral world governed by morality and pure domestic women. “Johnny,” however, cannot become “John” until he achieves masculinity and authenticity, which means that he must leave the old world of Allington behind and enter the contemporary, masculine-dominated world of business in the city.

Eames is a half-orphan who has been raised in the female dominated domestic bliss of Allington, but Trollope shows readers from the beginning that this middle-class man is a bit of a pathetic creature, clueless to the world in much the same way as Oliver. Unlike Oliver, however, Eames’s character, just as that of his deceased father, is judged by his failures to distinguish himself financially and professionally. Johnny’s father was not notable in the world (except as business failure), for he “had been a man of many misfortunes, having begun the world almost with affluence, and having ended it in poverty” (31)—after “los[ing] much money in experimental farming” (32). “Experimental” business ideas have no place in the world of the professional; instead, they are a mark of the struggling Victorian man of the past, someone who dreams and focuses his energy on ideals of the past represented by Allington as it exists in the contemporary setting of the novel. Allington is rural and seems to be populated by more women than men, and any man willing to stay there—or under its influence—is doomed to failure. Johnny, like his father, also is at high risk for failure in the novel, for he finds his comfort in Allington and the females there. As long as he is there, he remains a “hobbledehoy,” Trollope’s definition of the unformed man. Trollope emphasizes that Johnny is not yet a man early in the

novel and spends much time laying out the definition of the “hobbledehoy” in explicit terms, saying exactly what the unformed man must accomplish in order to become truly masculine and an adult middle-class male. With such attention paid to Johnny Eames and his progress, readers should accept that Trollope always intended for Lily Dale’s love story to be secondary.

The “hobbledehoy” is marked by several undesirable characteristics. Trollope explains that “[t]hey do not come forth to the world as Apollos.” The word “Apollo,” used to refer to Adolphus Crosbie, Eames’s rival in the battle for Lily Dale’s affection, indicates a male fully functioning in the world, well on his way to becoming distinguished as a professional. The image of the “Apollo” is as concerned with business success as it is masculinity, but Eames is far from becoming such a man. Instead, he unfortunately exhibits the traits of the hobbledehoy. Eames is “awkward, ungainly, and not yet formed in [his] gait; [he] straggle[s] with [his] limbs, and [is] shy; words do not come to [him] with ease, when words are required,” and he tends to “go much about alone, and blush[es] when women speak to [him].” Trollope continues his screed against Eames (and men like him), saying, “In truth, they are not as yet men, whatever the number may be of their years; and, as they are no longer boys, the world has found for them the ungraceful name of hobbledehoy” (30). Though at first the description could easily be applied to teenaged boys of any era, Trollope makes clear that he is not speaking of children. He describes fully grown men who are “no longer boys,” and their faults make them some sort of horrible hybrid of child-man—a man who cannot possibly succeed in the city’s business environment.

Trollope clearly blames the influence of places like Allington for the existence of such men, and this also means that by default Trollope means that women, domesticity, and outdated Victorian values make men into hobbledehoy, too. He scorns the world of Allington, stating that it is such a place (and such women who inhabit it) that make Eames what he is. “Such

hobbledehoys receive but little petting,” the narrator explains, “unless it be from a mother; and such a hobbledehoy was John Eames when he was sent away...to begin his life in the big room of a public office in London” (31).

The corrupting influence of Allington and its women will retain their hold on Eames until he is willing to let them go completely, and this does not happen immediately. Even when free from them and off in the city to pursue his career, he submits to damaging feminine influence. He takes “allowance...from his mother’s purse” and a room as a lodger with Mrs. Roper, whom Mrs. Eames personally questioned and approved before Johnny moved in (33). His mother’s watchful eye and the tainting influence of Allington remains with Eames throughout most of the novel, and it is his dreams of marrying Lily that keeps him from success. When “he went up to London, [he] was absolutely and irretrievably in love with Lily Dale,” and his love for her and his wish to be with her in Allington keeps him from marking himself as a professional. His eyes are always set on the rural countryside of Allington and all of its connections with a stagnant past. In the city, this inability to break with Allington stalls his ability to become a man of action and business. He becomes the willing victim of his landlady’s daughter, Amelia Roper, a woman whom he encourages yet he finds impossible to break free from as well. As a hobbledehoy, he remains insecure in the face of women, allowing them to surround him, render him powerless, and “sa[p]” him of his “male energy,” which should be used in the workplace (Sussman 5).

Johnny’s relationship with women leaves him impotent in the business world, but it also keeps him from developing a new type of authenticity. In past novels, authenticity as a masculine virtue was achieved through morality—specifically through the influence of a moral woman or home. Authenticity in the later Victorian era translates into action, and Eames, because he is stuck in a state of hobbledehoydom, finds it impossible to act. Instead, he only imagines action,

and this is an unmistakable sign that he is inauthentic. Though the authentic Victorian male was also a man of action, in past novels his actions were based in moral deeds rather than business decisions. The hobbledehoy is inauthentic in a new way—not because of any moral issue but because he is not a man of concrete action in the masculine public world.⁵

Even after much time in the city, Johnny remains the dreamer, a state that becomes more obvious when he ventures home to see Lily. His mind remains in the past, refusing to accept the present and the reality of the future. The narrator explains that, especially once Johnny arrives in Allington, all sophistication and masculine attributes he might have acquired in the city are lost, for “[h]e has been thinking of Lilian Dale ever since his friend had left him on the railway platform [to return to Allington]...[and h]e had been thinking of his meeting with Lily all the night and throughout the morning” (46). Worse than dreaming of imagined futures with Lily is that, even when given the opportunity, Eames refuses to act. Rather than boldly making his feelings known, he spends his time in wakeful dreams. During his meetings with Lily, “[h]e had never dared to speak to [her] of his love” (57) and can only mutter in her presence (81).

Trollope constantly reminds the reader of Eames inability to act, even titling one chapter “John Eames Takes a Walk,” a section of the novel which turns out to be an exploration of Eames’s imaginary life. His hobbledehoy nature is especially highlighted in this chapter, as he cannot break free of Allington’s influence. In this chapter, however, readers begin to see a

⁵ Discussing the tension that arises from the conflicting worlds of the domestic and the professional, Nicholas Dames, in “Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the Management of Ambition,” agrees that men in *The Small House at Allington* must leave the society of women and pleasure for the all-male work environment. Dames says, “Those who mix ‘social’ and ‘professional,’ career advance with affective life, such as...Adolphus Crosbie...come in for punishment” (267). Crosbie’s ultimate fate, however, is closer to that of Johnny Eames. Though some may see Eames’s ending description as a sad outcome, he is actually succeeding in the professional world—just as Crosbie triumphs when he leaves off social climbing for more time in the office.

change in Johnny. Though he cannot break free of Allington's or Lily's influence over him, he does recognize that something is wrong with him, perhaps because he has been living in the city for a significant amount of time. As he walks, the narrator says that he "was by no means happy in his mind as he did so," and Eames even says to himself, "I must go somewhere" (132). The urge to leave this relic of pre-Victorian society is healthy in Trollope's novel, but it is different from the travels undertaken by characters like Allan Woodcourt and Captain Kirke. He has no desire to save the world by carrying English morality to foreign shores. Instead, Johnny has a simple urge to flee, for it is Allington that is corrupting, not supporting, him.

As he walks, Eames obsesses over Lily, and it is during this description of his thoughts that Trollope once again returns to the subject of the hobbledehoy and masculinity. Trollope criticizes young men who "have not yet reached their manhood" and who are overly "thoughtful when alone." But Trollope does not advocate that Eames end his solitude by marrying. Instead, the solution is work. The narrator says, "Men, full fledged and at their work, are, for the most part, too busy for much thought; but lads, on whom the work of the world has not yet fallen with all its pressure,—they have time for thinking" (133). The implication here, however, is not merely that men must indulge in mind-numbing hard work. Taking in consideration all of the other conversations about and portrayals of work in the novel, work here means "full fledged" professionalization. Though Trollope has indicated that Eames has been working, any success he might have had has remained unnoted, likely because he is still an inactive hobbledehoy. The only thing readers learn about Eames's time in the office is that the name "Johnny" "had gone with him to his office" (36). But his recognition that something is wrong with him and his urge to flee his current mental and physical state (which is in Allington at the time he has the urge to

flee) prepares readers to see Johnny finally emerge as a new man and leave his hobbledehoy nature behind.

B. Professionalization: The New Path to Authenticity

John Eames bounces between the city and Allington for most of the novel, but after chapter fourteen, in which “John Eames Takes a Walk,” readers begin to see a change. Eames’s recognition that something is not altogether correct in his life causes him to transform. Before he can change into a proper Victorian man in the city, however, he must begin to cut ties with his old image in Allington, where most people think of him as a boy rather than as a man. Chapter twenty-one, titled “John Eames Encounters Two Adventures, and Displays Great Courage in Both,” marks the beginning of Eames’s transformation.

During a visit to Allington in chapter twenty-one, Johnny is once again walking, but this time we see him take two giant leaps into manhood. First of all, he confronts Lily Dale, telling her when she tries to cut off his awkward confessions of love, “No, Lily; you don’t understand all that I would say. You have never known how often and how much I have thought of you; how dearly I have loved you” (205). The confession finally spoken aloud is monumental enough, but it is what happens later that is most important. Lily refuses Johnny, of course, and readers expect that Johnny will once again spend an entire chapter moping through the woods. Indeed, directly after the rejection, “his heart [was still] full of the scene which had just passed,” and he is wandering dejectedly through the countryside (206). In the past, a return to obsession with Lily and imagining a life with her at Allington signaled more walking and more thinking, but this time something propels Johnny out of his gloom. He hears the Lord de Guest, the earl who owns the Manor House in Allington, shouting for help, because he is trapped by a raging bull.

The bull incident in *The Small House at Allington* is the first moment in which readers can raise their opinion of Eames. Without a thought, Johnny “ran on gallantly to the peer’s assistance, as he would have run to that of any peasant in the land.... [And though John] feared many things which no man should fear,...he did not fear personal mishap or injury to his own skin and bones” (208). The middle-class man saves the day in heroic fashion, aware of his superior bravery and strength compared to that of the aristocracy, the lower classes, or even nature. The most significant aspect of the moment for Trollope, however, is Johnny’s spontaneous action. He does not take time to think or analyze his danger; he simply acts. More than this, however, he even takes it upon himself to give direction. In earlier descriptions of Eames, Trollope frequently uses passive voice and has him speak without purpose. In this chapter, however, Eames speaks with confidence and authority, from the moment he confesses to Lily to the point where he surprisingly gives orders to the earl. As he corners the bull, trying to keep the earl out of harm’s way, Eames tells the older man, “Slowly does it; slowly does it; don’t run!” The narrator remarks that Eames “assum[ed] in the heat of the moment a tone of counsel which would have been very foreign to him under other circumstances” (209). The moment is impressive, for Eames finally becomes an agent of action in his own story for the first time, and the reader suddenly sees him capable of leadership. Though Johnny will struggle to override his feelings for Lily far into the future (even into *The Last Chronicle of Barset*), he will never marry or return for good to the outdated domestic scene in Allington. His ability to act decisively enables him enter into a state of manhood, but it is a state that he must adapt to without the influence of women.

His recognition of this new phase of his life becomes even more obvious when he encounters Mrs. Roper’s daughter for the first time after the confession to Lily and the bull

incident. Whereas in the past he could not confront Amelia any more than he could confront Lily, even though he wanted Amelia out of his life, when he returns to London after his bravery with the bull, things are very different. Upon arrival, Amelia scolds him, telling him, “Oh, John, how late you are!” He simply replies, ““Yes, I am;--very late,”” and “pass[es] her by on the stairs without another word” (322). Though he has not firmly rid himself of her affections, he is making an important admission: he is “late” in his development, and he must do something about it. He also “passed her by on the stairs without another word,” refusing to be drawn into conversation with her, as he has been so many times in the past, or to become a pawn in her schemes.

From this point forward, Eames makes every effort to become a proper man. He still cannot break free completely of Allington’s and Lily’s influence, but the reader sees him taking more and more decisive action. He now confronts (and beats to a pulp) Adolphus Crosbie (rather than shrinking from him as happened earlier in the novel), and from the moment he returns to London, his focus turns to work. Even after beating Crosbie, Eames does not go home to nurse his anger. Instead, he “was at his office punctually at twelve” (334). In the chapter that begins with his entrance into the office after the fight, titled ““See, the Conquering Hero Comes,”” the narrator explains that, even though the incident had been violent, it was one of triumph. The narrator also finds it necessary to tell us at this moment that Johnny “was gradually acquiring for himself a good footing among the Income-tax officials.” Trollope continues:

He knew his work, and did it with some manly confidence in his own powers, and also with some manly indifference to the occasional frowns of mighty men of the department. He was, moreover, popular—being somewhat of a radical in his demeanour, and holding by his own rights, even though mighty men should frown. In truth, he was emerging from his hobbledehoyhood and entering upon his young manhood, having probably to go through much folly and some false sentiment in that period of his existence, but still with fair promise of true

manliness beyond to those who were able to read the signs of his character. (354)

The repetition of references to “manliness” and “manhood” are impossible to ignore. Equally notable is that Trollope says that “manliness” balances on Johnny “kn[owing] his work” and having the ability to do what he thinks is best in terms of the office and his career in spite of his superiors, the “mighty men of the department.” Authenticity in this environment and the later-Victorian world depends less upon dedication to a moral code than it does upon adherence to one’s professional business principles. John Eames has emerged victorious as a hero—not because he saved a man from a bull but because he is becoming identified as a professional and shedding all traces of mediocrity that is associated with the hobbledehoy. He is “confiden[t]” and does not fail to speak his mind. And, though he may not be an expert in dealing with his emotions about women, he is no longer “blushing” or mumbling in front of them either. Johnny is now, “it [was] felt by all in the office[,]...a leading man among them, and that he was one with whom each of them would be pleased to be intimate” (362).

When Trollope returns to Eames’s character in the narrative, he will refer to him more often as John (at least while he is in the city), and readers will see him active in the professional environment, being offered promotions and leaving the Roper house for good. As Trollope explains, however, work is “without much immediate satisfaction” as long as women are in the picture (460). Eames still cannot let Lily go, and as long as he insists on thinking that he has a chance with her and in forming the traditional domestic union, Trollope insists that Johnny cannot become a true man.

C. “John Eames Becomes a Man”: The Hobbledehoy Transformed

Eames’s decisive action and commitment to advancing in his career as a professional forces him to take inventory of his masculinity. Trollope makes a special effort in the text to leave the development of the plot in favor of explaining the importance of his version of masculinity and how Eames is developing into the new model of the Victorian middle-class man: the authentic professional. Even as late as chapter fifty-one, Trollope continues to explain the importance of Eames’s ongoing transformation from hobbledehoy into man, and he also continues to frame manhood in how it relates to professionalization. Trollope states:

He [Eames] was aware that his career in London had not hitherto been one on which he could look back with self-respect. He had lived with friends whom he did not esteem; he had been idle, and sometimes worse than idle; and he had allowed himself to be hampered by the pretended love of a woman [Amelia] for whom he had never felt any true affection, and by whom he had been cozened out of various foolish promises which even yet were hanging over his head.... In truth his hobbledehoyhood was dropping off from him, as its old skin drops from a snake. Much of the feeling and something of the knowledge of manhood was coming on him, and he was beginning to recognise to himself that the future manner of his life must be to him a matter of very serious concern. (511)

Trollope makes sure to blast the reader one last time with his insistence that, in spite of business success, Eames is not yet a man. Just as Oliver Twist could not become a morally proper middle-class citizen while living on the streets or in Fagin’s home, John Eames realizes that he cannot become a professional man without leaving behind his sordid roommate at the Roper home (a young man who is lazy and has no hope of becoming a professional because he is so involved in the pursuit of pleasure and women) and abandoning the influence and company of women altogether. In spite of Eames’s introspective moment, however, his thoughts quickly turn back to Lily Dale, and the reader realizes he still has a struggle ahead. Admirably, he immediately breaks off with Amelia Roper, but he is still attached to Lily and, by default, Allington. In Trollope’s mind, there is no other obstacle in the face of Eames’s masculine development

When Eames is rejected by Lily yet again a short time later, he walks away angry with himself, telling himself, ““What an ass I have been,—always and ever!” But it is also in this moment that he not only recognizes that he is not a man but is “conscious of his hobbledehoyhood” for the first time. Unfortunately, he only places that recognition in relation to his position with Lily, believing that the “backwardness on his part in assuming manhood”... “had rendered him incapable of making himself acceptable to Lily” (551). Once again, he leaves Allington almost immediately and returns to work. This final confrontation with Lily (at least in this novel) is the last time readers see Eames in Allington, and Trollope makes clear that the novel’s story has been Eames’s all along when he titles the final chapter “John Eames Becomes a Man.” In this chapter, readers only encounter the hero at work, dedicating himself to professionalism even as he feels the bitterness of his loss. He continues to place work as his most important occupation, however, and by doing so he becomes authentic and professional. Trollope states in his last chapter:

Here we will leave John Eames, and in doing so I must be allowed to declare that only now, at this moment, has he entered on his manhood. Hitherto he has been a hobbledehoy,—a calf, as it were, who had carried his calfishness later into life than is common with calves; but who did not, perhaps, on that account, give promise of making a worse ox than the rest of them. His life hitherto, as recorded in these pages, had afforded him no brilliant success, had hardly qualified him for the role of hero which he has been made to play. I feel that I have been in fault in giving prominence to a hobbledehoy, and that I should have told my story better had I brought Mr Crosbie more conspicuously forward on my canvas. He at any rate has gotten himself a wife—as a hero always should do; whereas I must leave my poor friend Johnny without any matrimonial prospects. (601)

The final sentence, however, is meant in sarcasm. Though it confirms that the masculine plot has been the one foremost on Trollope’s mind all along, it clearly advocates for Crosbie’s opposite fate. Indeed, Crosbie “has gotten himself a wife,” but that wife has thankfully left him, for while he was married he left off being an “Apollo” who was notably successful in the business world

and descended into a degraded life at the mercy of a woman. While with his wife, he drank heavily, became lazy, and abandoned his career. When she leaves him, the reader discovers that Crosbie recovers his masculinity and becomes a professional once again. Trollope reiterates his point about men necessarily abandoning women and the old Victorian value system in his conclusion, stating:

As regards Crosbie, I am inclined to believe that he did again recover his power at his office. He was Mr Butterwell's master, and the master also of Mr Optimist, and the major. He knew his business, and could do it, which was more, perhaps, than might fairly be said of any of the other three. Under such circumstances he was sure to get in his hand, and lead again. But elsewhere his star did not recover its ascendancy. He dined at his club almost daily, and there were those with whom he habitually formed some little circle. But he was not the Crosbie of former days,—the Crosbie known in Belgravia and in St. James's Street. He had taken his little vessel bravely out into the deep waters, and had sailed her well while fortune stuck close to him. But he had forgotten his nautical rules, and success had made him idle. His plummet and lead had not been used, and he had kept no look-out ahead. Therefore the first rock he met shivered his bark to pieces. (611-612)

Though Trollope's final words are about Crosbie and not Eames, the description confirms Eames's status as a hero. Crosbie once had the potential to outshine everyone, but his fault was trying to use marriage to an aristocrat as a way to advance in the professional world (rather than through exceptional merit) and secure his public success. Because he "forgo[t] his nautical rules" and ventured into the world of domesticity and women rather than staying afloat in his already successful place in the masculine world of business, he cannot reach the same heights as he could have done—nor is he a man with as many prospects as John Eames in the end.⁶

⁶ My interpretation of Adolphus Crosbie's success does contradict most scholarship; however, most critics choose to focus their interpretations on the love story within *The Small House at Allington*. Because of this, many see Crosbie as a static character. For example, in "Trollope and the Fixity of the Self," Christopher Herbert argues, "Adolphus Crosbie... finds himself torn between his new and revitalizing love for Lily Dale and his long-ingrained and deadening devotion to luxury, independence, and social success. Crosbie can see clearly that such values are in the long run—indeed in the short run too—inimical to his happiness. All his conscious motives impel him toward Lily and toward renewal, but in the end he is helplessly blocked by his

In this early vision of what would become Sussman's masculine plot, Trollope shows that Dickens's orphan narrative is outdated, for as Sussman states, "[d]omesticity was the characteristic of a bourgeoisie whose own sense of personal security was felt to be at risk" (178). In *The Small House at Allington*, Trollope shows that Victorian middle-class society is secure and should no longer be worried about survival. The orphan narrative begun by Dickens has been altered for good, and a masculine-based plot will take its place.

unconscious habitual self; his 'duality,' we discover, never contained a real potential for change after all.... Crosbie can only end up behaving, in spite of himself, like Crosbie" (231). If this assessment were true, however, Crosbie would have demanded to retain his position in his wife's social world, he would have continued to be unmotivated at work, and he would not have recognized his faults. Crosbie, in fact, does all of these things, becoming an example, like John Eames, of why professionalization is the best possible choice for men.

CONCLUSION

Many people only remember the literary and popular depictions of orphaned Victorian street children and their struggles to survive, but the fact remains that most orphans in nineteenth-century literature were not impoverished homeless waifs or “street arabs.” Instead, the majority of orphans in nineteenth century novels were middle-class children. Paying attention to how middle-class orphans function in Victorian novels reveals that authors used them as a symbol of middle-class fears about survival throughout the era.

The trope of orphanhood allowed authors to project a trajectory of middle-class formation. The Dickensian literary orphan, symbolizing the middle-class struggle to legitimize itself and secure its position in a country experiencing an unprecedented shift between the old world and the new, became an example to emulate, and the character would be rewritten over and over again, each time embodying the same group of people and values, but would change slightly to reveal new anxieties facing the middle class. The novels analyzed in this dissertation share commonalities that reveal a kinship between mid-nineteenth-century narratives. Each novel revises the orphan prototype designed by Dickens in *Oliver Twist*, placing the orphan in various situations but always returning to the same conclusion: the middle class can only survive and legitimize itself if it remains true to its value system. The orphans in these books experience similar trials before emerging as successful members of the middle class: they undergo separation from an established past and home, fights against being in a state of itinerancy even as they struggle to survive, and experience a purification through illness that either allows them to emerge as verified members of the middle class who can enact authenticity, or ordains them to

die because they cannot be successful. These plot commonalities reveal both anxieties about survival and a trust in a system all Victorian middle-class citizens can follow to ensure their class's survival. The orphaned child, emblematic of the middle class struggling to survive in a world that will not acknowledge it or that has forgotten its middle-class values, moves toward the goal of cultivating authenticity for itself and, in turn, strengthening the middle class by doing so.

When Dickens manipulated *Oliver Twist* into a figure symbolic of the middle class, he did so under economic and social conditions fraught with tension. His portrayal of Oliver, and later Nell, suggests the shift in control between the upper classes and the middle classes. Oliver's commitment to morality and authenticity served as a model for the middle class, for Dickens believed that commitment to those ideals would pull the middle class from its shaky position to that of long-term survival in the years to come. Revising Oliver into various characters within *The Old Curiosity Shop* allowed Dickens to emphasize the need for both men and women to adopt gendered behaviors, which Dickens saw as key to their success. All the while, he placed pressure upon women and the purity of the domestic, a space he continually emphasized must remain stationary and uncorrupt in its duty to provide a center in which middle-class success could form.

Nell's destruction at the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop* posed problematic questions for female authors of the Victorian era, for due to the fact that these women had careers, they violated many of the ideals Dickens set forth as model behaviors for women. These women writers attempted to rewrite Nell's plot, but as shown in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mill on the Floss*, even they could not propose a good end for orphaned female characters who adopted lives associated with Gypsiness. The orphans in their novels also stand in as symbols of the middle

class, but the orphans' stories reveal heightened fears about survival that cannot be reconciled until the narrative submits to the Dickensian orphan's pathway to middle-class formation.

Just as the female authors began to take issue with certain aspects of the Dickensian orphan narrative, Dickens also found that his original storytelling device faced challenges as the nineteenth century progressed. As the middle-class evolved into the dominant ruling class of England, Dickens believed that the class as a whole began to lose focus. He drew his readers' attention to this decline and the problems it posed to the middle class's long-term survival in *A Child's History of England* and *Bleak House*. In these books, Dickens turns his concern towards the nation, presenting England as an orphan in *A Child's History of England*, emphasizing that England's people (i.e. the good middle class) suffer when middle-class values are absent. In *Bleak House*, Dickens emphasizes what happens when England begins to lose its middle-class foundation of morality and authenticity. The orphans (i.e. the middle class) in *Bleak House* begin to suffer, and their survival is jeopardized in new ways. In the end, however, Dickens reaffirms his original narrative in *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, emphasizing proper male and female formation as essential to middle-class success, and order is restored.

By the last decade of Dickens's life, the middle class has weathered many political, economic, and social challenges. Dickens never abandoned his original portrayal of orphanhood. Even in his final novels, Dickens still places faith in middle-class authenticity and power. Though his orphans' fates become darker and more confused in his later novels, successful middle-class families survive because they adhere to established values based upon authenticity and morality. From *Our Mutual Friend*'s attempt to cope with urbanization and the decay of an

old way of life¹ to the unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which explores many themes, not the least of which includes the impact of increasing English activity in the empire², successful orphans survive the challenges they face because they reenact the story begun in *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

The middle-class, by the 1860s, was a secure and powerful body, and even though Dickens would not alter his own stories, other authors changed the Dickensian orphan narrative for good. Though the essence of *Oliver Twist*'s story is still visible in these later novels, authors began to discard the Dickensian, mid-century emphasis upon domesticity and attachment to women as essential moral guides for men. Instead, later novels move towards a masculine plot that relegates women to the past and men to the future. In this dissertation, I examine Wilkie Collins's *No Name* as a novel indicating a shift in the Dickensian orphan narrative. Though its content is focused upon a woman, Collins shifts redemptive power to the male, an important change indicative of how the orphan story will change in years to come. This shift is notably visible in Anthony Trollope's *The Small House at Allington*, a novel which leaves the women stuck in stasis while focusing all of its energy on instructing later nineteenth-century boys on how to become men. Trollope introduces the plot of professionalization as a perfected path to middle-class dominance—a path that excludes women. The influence of women and the

¹ In "The Artistic Reclamation of Waste in *Our Mutual Friend*," Nancy Aycock Metz proposes that the novel marks a transition in Dickens's career. She says, "[I]n this novel, which deals with the imagination's ability to embrace and transfigure a world in which chaos, waste, and suffering invite paralysis and despair, the artist as a character has disappeared into the background. Here there is no artist-hero whose expanding perceptions guide us through the world of the novel. Instead of David or a Pip, we are invited to observe Twemlow observing, and his speculative ventures into the area of personal relationships always seem to come up short" (61). I would add, however, that, just as in *Bleak House*, the ending of *Our Mutual Friend* is not completely dismal, and Dickens appears to be clinging to at least some of his prior beliefs.

² For more information about *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*'s commentary on the British Empire, see "'Going to Wake Up Egypt': Exhibiting Empire in *Edwin Drood*" by Hyungji Park (*Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30.2).

domestic plot begin to disappear altogether in late nineteenth-century novels, eventually abandoned for good as the orphan narrative is adopted by boys' adventure fiction novelists.

A decline in middle-class domesticity and its overwhelming role in Victorian society began to occur in the 1870s especially, shortly after the attraction of the professional novel began to fade away. According to Tosh, "The merits of living in domesticity were no longer clear to this [new] generation of [later-Victorian] middle-class men, and...increasing numbers either postponed marriage or else carved out a larger sphere for all-male society within marriage...[, and] the characteristically Victorian culture of domesticity can be said to have entered a new phase [by the 1870s]" (146). Men in the late nineteenth century "[had] a much keener sense of the drawbacks of domestic life," Tosh explains, "and this coincided with a growing reluctance to marry, in circumstances where marriage would previously have been taken for granted as a part of a natural progression from youth to manhood" (172).

Like Sussman, Tosh believes that this shift away from the domestic unsurprisingly changed literature. "Quite suddenly in the mid-1880s a new genre of bestselling adventure fiction was born.... Their heroes are fighters, hunters and frontiersmen distinguished by their daring and resourcefulness. Men set off into the unknown [in these books]...to fulfill their destiny unencumbered by feminine constraint or by emotional ties with home." These books reflected England's concerns and state at the time, for there was a "thin dividing line" between the subjects of these novels and "Britain's actual empire" (174). Most interesting, however, is that the professional's plot seen in the novels of the 1860s (and into the 1870s) altered to fit the adventure novel, in which the lands conquered by the British Empire become a haven for men. The men going out into the world as an unstoppable English force have "colonial careers" in foreign lands, and the colonies become the replacement for the professional novel's urban stage.

Like the city in Trollope's *The Small House at Allington*, the "empire was run by bachelors...undistracted by feminine ties" (175).

Though the traditional middle-class narrative disappeared, the orphan narrative did not, as one might expect. The wandering child trying to legitimize itself and find a home did so not because he represented a class that needed to secure its position in England but because he came to represent England trying to maintain its security in the world. He became an emblem of England's progress in the world, his trajectory of formation shifting to move toward his (and, by default, England's) survival in the empire. The orphan's story is basically a repeat of his journey in the middle-class novel, only this time he represents strictly masculine power in a world dominated by English might. Additionally, though in the middle-class domestic novel of the past the orphan strove to develop a middle-class authenticity that would lead him to become a productive citizen capable of providing for himself in the world, orphaned boy heroes of later-nineteenth century novels (like the title character of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, the boys in the military school of *The Complete Stalky and Co.*, or any number of characters in H. Rider Haggard's novels, for example) do not seek to distinguish themselves as individual citizens. Instead, they become walking embodiments of England and English Imperial policy, succeeding only when they no longer see themselves as individuals, but instead as perfected representatives of their country.

This subtle but important shift raises questions about the role of authenticity in these novels, since these heroes appear to be enacting a national version of authenticity rather than a class-based construction of identity built upon authenticity (as Trilling defines it) and morality. The development of authenticity in later novels does not occur within any type of domestic environment (in fact, it is rare to find much information about a boy's home life or early contact

with women in any of the later adventure novels³), but instead happens when boys are placed in isolated locations (like schools) with other boys and male role models, where they ingest all of England's values and philosophies about empire. From here they are sent out into the world to display those values and philosophies, essentially hoping to make foreign lands more English—and hoping to keep those lands in England's power.

The narrative of these boys adventure novels remain directed distinctly toward the middle class, with middle-class heroes showing the way to success for other young middle-class children. Rather than emphasizing any kind of domestic experience, as stated before, the boys in these novels are immediately removed from the home and all are essentially orphaned. They learn to survive and conform to English standards in a brutal all-male environment, which prepares them for life in the empire. An excellent example of this new plot occurs in Rudyard Kipling's *The Complete Stalky & Co.*, for example, which advocates that its cast of strictly middle-class schoolboys adopt a code of behavior based upon authenticity derived from nationalistic training. The stories in *The Complete Stalky & Co.* trace the adventures and brutal daily lives of three young men at a British military school; and while Kipling may have intended to recreate his own experiences at a similar school he attended during his youth, he actually reveals the English strategy of successfully scooping up its citizens most likely destined to serve in the empire, orphaning them from society, and molding them into soldiers incapable of reacting or thinking in any way opposite to their training.

³ A good example of this is Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, a novel which has more information about the boy hero's early upbringing than most adventure novels. The novel begins with the boy James (Jim) Hawkins living with his mother at an inn in England, but Stevenson quickly moves him out of that environment and sends him into all-male company (and also into adventure off of England's shores). Jim can only learn to be a man away from the influence of women, much like H. Rider Haggard implies in the novel *She*, in which women who hold power over men send them to their doom. Most of these novels, as Haggard's popular *King Solomon's Mines* emphasizes, do not contain "a *petticoat* in the whole history" of their boy's tales (10).

Rather than emphasizing morality or allowing any type of a feminine influence to touch the boys, school officials encourage the practice of bullying, a behavior allowing for both bonding among the boys and encouraging the young men to conform to a new type of authentic Britishness. Such brainwashing is successful because it forces the boys to deny any personal life experiences. Although Stalky, Turk, and Beetle, the protagonists of *The Complete Stalky & Co.*, have undoubtedly been bullied themselves (and, indeed, bully each other), their ability to put aside previous feelings of resentment at such treatment indicates that the school has successfully infiltrated their minds, and its philosophy dictates all reactions to stimuli. As the boys grow older, this is demonstrated more and more as the stakes increase and childish incidents turn into real-life business within the empire.

The success of the school's influence over the boys makes itself known once the children grow up. Kipling writes one story (actually, the second he completed) in which the boys are adults living in India: "Slaves of the Lamp" (part 2).⁴ The boys appear as British officials in India, with Beetle meeting up with Turk and others from the school. Stalky, however, is nowhere to be seen. All of his former school friends ask about the boy most respected and who most adamantly pursued a British military career abroad, and Turk finally reveals that he has seen Stalky. As to Stalky's fate, Turk says, "I was in camp in the Jullunder doab and stumbled slap on Stalky in a Sikh village; sitting on the one chair of state with half the population grovelling before him, a dozen Sikh babies on his knees, an old harridan clappin' him on the shoulder, and a garland o' flowers round his neck" (296). The image of the dominant Englishman surrounded by adoring Indians validates the superiority of not only the British but also the English military education system. Isolating children at a young age, instilling Imperialist values in an

⁴In the first part of "Slaves of the Lamp", the boys are acting out a play written about the *Arabian Nights*. This second tale enforces their ability to control the telling of empire as well.

environment in which those values were acted out day to day, not only manufactured the soldiers the empire sought to produce, but also took away any other option but for these children to turn out to be “Slaves of the Lamp”. Although Stalky’s existence in India may appear to be successful, adventurous, and exciting, it is really just a culmination of his education and the brainwashing he absorbed while in the British military school. From the time he entered the school, Stalky (and the others who are also now in India) has only one purpose and option. While many may read his youthful character as a repulsive bully, he is actually portrayed as an admirable character, one who ultimately succeeds in the most important role he has been built for in his life.

Kipling’s *The Complete Stalky & Co.* presents the new vision of middle-class male formation and education, and his famous novel *Kim*, written a year later in 1901, presents another version of a Dickensian orphan. Kim, a child abandoned within the Empire and left to survive on his own, reminds readers of *Oliver Twist* or *Bleak House*’s Jo reincarnated. Novels about orphans, however, become darker and darker as the nineteenth-century progresses into the twentieth century. Their narratives continue to evolve from those Dickens began, but the quest to find an identity outside of government influence becomes nearly impossible, and the quest for authenticity or morality fade away.

From Charles Dickens to Emily Brontë and Wilkie Collins, readers see the same class concerns and pathway to success play out. Dickens’s insistence in *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* that survival of proper middle-class citizens depends upon male and female children undergoing specific trajectories of formation provides the foundation of the modern orphan narrative. The Victorian concern with middle-class survival informed its approach towards many groups of people, including literal orphans. The influence of these tales continues

to be noticed in modern attitudes toward charity, fostering programs, and even contemporary literature. Even twentieth-century British literary orphans like Harry Potter find themselves enacting a plot grounded in the Victorian orphan narrative, even though their stories do not necessarily culminate in securing a class's success. Instead, though identity is based within a group identity, these orphaned heroes are serving a larger political or nationalistic cause which discourages individual authenticity and morality. Essentially, orphan novels written beyond the mid-nineteenth century show a return of the fog-covered England Dickens so feared in *Bleak House*. Though contemporary authors may or may not be concerned with class survival, survival in general is always an issue at stake—and the fear of the orphan's disintegration can be traced back to Charles Dickens's little orphan who asked for more.

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