

LITERAL AND METAPHORICAL FRAMES IN DICKEN'S LITTLE DORRIT

Regina Helena Urias Cabreira



Little Mother.

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METAPHORICAL
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LITTLE DORRIT



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PRESENTATION

This work, **Literal and Metaphorical Frames in Dickens' *Little Dorrit***, was originally written in 1996 as an MA dissertation for the Graduation Program at the Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures - Federal University of Parana, Curitiba-PR, Brazil.

The scientific contribution of this work lies on its originality* in dealing with the novel "Little Dorrit" by Charles Dickens, through the perspective of the frame theory developed by Irving Goffman, in his outstanding work in the area of social psychology, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. This study is intended to researchers in the field of English Language Literatures, specifically the English Victorian era, as well as the magnificent work produced by Charles Dickens, one of the greatest authors of all times.

Our main aim was to discuss not only the structural layout and elements of the novel but highlight the organization of social interaction presented and detailed by Dickens. Such study provided us not only with a profound and detailed literary view of *Little Dorrit* but also a sociological scrutiny of how the Victorian society was portrayed in Dickens' much praised London. So the structural elements found in the elaborate text give the reader the hints for the intricate social pattern of that period as well as the important criticism posed by Dickens through his cunning and critical view of his peers and age. The leading character herself, Little Dorrit, becomes an *avatar* for the themes, ideas, images and symbols explored throughout the novel. Her life represents the life of the mob, of the destitute, of the ones who suffered the hardships brought and caused by the Industrial Revolution and the background in which it flourished and, at the same time, crushed human lives.

Here, besides exploring Goffman's theory as our main reference we also used Boris Uspensky's theory on point of view in *A Poetics of Composition* and the concept of *chronotope* by Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel". Moreover, as a way to take our analysis a step further, we focused on the metaphoric meaning of the frames observed in the structure of the novel and how they represented and expressed a deeper layer of what Dickens was trying to convey to his readers, so the superficial level of the narrative

is intrinsically linked to the deeper level of the content and what was discussed through it. On the one hand, the *literal frames* build and represent a hard and defying unscrupulous structure while, on the other hand, the *metaphorical frames* lead the reader beyond the apparent ordered reality of society and its inhabitants. Antagonistic forces dwell together in order to allow order and chaos, duality within circularity, restraint and freedom within the boundaries enclosing and stretching out of the cosmologic center involving human beings. This is what *Little Dorrit* represents!

*According to the UFPR Digital Database, this has been the only dissertation written on *Little Dorrit* in the State of Parana so far; according to the Vésila Biblioteca Digital, within the 2417 items in its database none refers to *Little Dorrit* in Brazil.

The author

INTRODUCTION

Reviving a Classic

The reason to revive a classic like *Little Dorrit* is based on the attempt to explore the extraordinary enchanting effect it has upon the human mind. Sainte-Beuve's description of a classic, below, leads us towards a justification for such an effect, for

a true classic [...] is an author who has enriched the human mind, who has really augmented its treasures, who has made it take one more step forward, some unequivocal moral truth, or has once more seized hold of some eternal passion in that heart where all seems known and explored; who has rendered his thought, his observation, or his discovery under no matter what form, but broad and large, refined, sensible, sane, and beautiful in itself, who has spoken to all in a style of his own which yet belongs to all the world, in a style which is new without neologisms, new and ancient, easily contemporaneous with every age.¹

A literary work, a classic, seems to have as its very essence the inspiring "eternal passion" which guides our uncontrollable drive to revive it, to praise its contemporaneous aspect and to attempt to relate ourselves to its values and truth. A classic has the power to keep itself alive by way of the many different lights we try to shed over it, no matter how distant we are from the time of its origin. Such a temporal gap can be said to be the element which leads us to this endless and recurring attempt to scrutinize and understand a classic, for it provides us with the drive to reclaim ideas and values that have long been cherished by mankind.

¹ SAINTE-BEUVE, C.A. "What is a Classic?" In ADAMS, H. *Critical Theory Since Plato*, p.556-562.

Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit*² is such a classic. As pointed out by Sainte-Beuve, it "is beautiful in itself [..., it] has spoken to all [...,] to all the world [...and is] contemporaneous with every age". In analysing *Little Dorrit*, our aim is to "revive" its criticism, for certain aspects of the novel have not been sufficiently developed in critical studies. This choice is rooted in the fact that it is a sample of literary mastery, apart from being an important document and mirror of a controversial age in which the individual had to learn to deal with social, historical, moral and personal changes.

Certain aspects of the novel have already been extensively criticised through books, articles, thesis, etc.. We could mention some works which analysed it in terms of *mode of structure*, such as Viktor Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose*, Northrop Frye's "Dickens and the Comedy of Humours," John G. Romano Jr.'s "Dickens and the Form of the Realist Novel" and Nicholas H. Morgan's "Reading the Novels of Charles Dickens: Theory and Practice". *Plot*, as seen in Joan Winslow's "Dickens's Sentimental Plot: A Formal Analysis of Three Novels". *Characterization*, as found in Jane Bengel's "The Rhetoric of Characterization: A Study of Dickens' Mr. Dombey and Arthur Clennam," in Annette D. Klemp's "Dickens and Melodrama: Character Presentation and Plot Motifs in Six Novels" and in Richard Bruce's "Mind-Forg'd Manacles: Dickens' Late Heroes and Heroines". *Setting and symbolism*, as analysed in James Gifford's "Symbolic Settings in the Novels of Charles Dickens". *Style*, as we find in Mikhail Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel," in Janet Larson's "Designed to Tell: The Shape of Language in Dickens' *Little Dorrit*," and in Melvin Y. Kubota's "The Legacy of Babel: The Theme of Language and Imagination in Charles Dickens's Late Novels". *Perspective*, as studied in James Christie's "Satiric and Sentimental Modes in Dickens' Later Novels: *Dombey and Son*,

² DICKENS, C. *Little Dorrit*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953. (ALL QUOTES ARE FROM THIS EDITION.)

Bleak House, *Little Dorrit*, and *Our Mutual Friend*, in Gordon A. Magnuson's "Narrator Voice and Moral Vision in Six Novels of Charles Dickens," in Elsie B. Michie's "'Masterly Fictions': Narrative as Dialect in *The Pickwick Papers*, *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit* and *Great Expectations*," and in Audey A. Jaffe's "'Vanishing Points': The Dickens Narrator and the Fantasy of Omniscience," or in other general studies such as John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens* and Albert J. Guerard's *The Triumph of the Novel: Dickens, Dostoevsky, Faulkner*. Among other structural and thematic aspects, however, we could not find, in the material available for our research, a structuralist analysis which would handle the various parts of the labyrinthine world of the novel without compromising its essence and which would simultaneously be linked to the social organization within the novel. Therefore, by choosing this approach based on a theory of "frames," our analysis aims at adding another perspective to the study of *literal* and *metaphorical* elements in *Little Dorrit*.

Another point which incites us towards a thorough understanding of Dickens's mode of structuralization is the existence of two antagonistic interpretations of it. On the one hand, Northrop Frye, in his essay "Dickens and the Comedy of Humours," mentioned above, says that what Dickens writes

are not novels but fairy tales in the low mimetic displacement [...] the real story in Dickens's novels [are] a rather *simple set of movements* within a large group of characters. To this a *mechanical plot* seems to have been attached like an outboard motor to a rowboat, just to get things moving faster and more noisily.³

The fact that Frye considers Dickens's novels just like "fairy tales" seems rather misleading, for if we pay attention to all the details with which the story in *Little Dorrit* is built and how they are combined to create much more

³ FRYE, N. "Dickens and the Comedy of Humours." In _____. *The Stubborn Structure*. London: Methuen, 1970, p.218, my italics.

than a “simple set of movements,” we can agree that Dickens’ novels offer us more than a simple plot, which, if “mechanical” at all, is as full of “complexity” as the society depicted by the author. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens seems to have worked out every single detail in order to convey a complex picture of life and not the frenetic movement of a plot being pulled by “an outboard motor”.

On the other hand, contrasted to Frye’s negative criticism of Dickens, we have Viktor Shklovsky’s comments in his essay “Dickens and the Mystery Novel”:

What is the explanation for the success of the mystery novel, from Ann Radcliffe to Dickens? [...] (along the development of the novel as a genre). In order to connect several intrigues, it was found convenient to use the technique of the *mystery novel*. The final result was the *complex plot structure* of Dickens. The mystery novel allows us to interpolate into the work *large chunks of everyday life*, which, while serving the purpose of impeding the action, feel the pressure of the plot and are therefore perceived as a part of the artistic whole [...] That is why the *mystery novel* was a “*social novel*”.⁴

This provides us with the idea of “complex plot structure” built through the aid of “large chunks of everyday life”. These “large chunks” in the novel are responsible for the framework organization we want to point out, for their *internal* and *external* action and interaction denotes the very “essence” we seek in a “mystery/social novel” like *Little Dorrit*.

In this sense, Frye’s and Shklovsky’s counterbalanced comments help us to reinforce our argument in relation to the hidden meaning to be found within the amalgam formed by the literal (surface) and the metaphorical (deep) frameworks of the novel.

This study does not intend to compare *Little Dorrit* to Dickens’s other works for we assume that Dickens’s mastery can also be clearly apprehended if

⁴ SHKLOVSKY, V. “Dickens and the Mystery Novel.” In _____. *Theory of Prose*. USA: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991, p.145, my italics.

we dive into the universe of any one of his works. Neither do we intend to prove or defend the idea that this *is the greatest* of his novels, or to choose it as *the example* of his work, as some critics tend to do with certain novels,⁵ for we think that to praise only one work of an author like Dickens would mean not only to undervalue his other works, but to forget that a novel can be regarded as weak or strong in certain aspects depending on the eyes that perceive it.⁶

Frame Theory

In order to submit the compositional elements of *Little Dorrit* to a structuralist scrutiny, this work employs as a leading theoretical approach Erving Goffman's theory of frames developed in *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*.⁷ The central topic of his theory is the study of "the organization of experience [...] of the structure of experience individuals have at any moment of their social lives".⁸

Goffman states that the concept of "frame" he employs is based on Gregory Bateson's in his essay "A Theory of Play and Phantasy," which refers to "the question of unseriousness and seriousness, allowing us to see what a starting thing experience is, such that a bit of serious activity can be used as a

⁵ See Harold Bloom's comments in *The Western Canon*, where Dickens's *Bleak House* is chosen as the sole representative of his works.

⁶ The text of *Little Dorrit* (1857) is a reformulation of the one that appeared in the "Charles Dickens Edition" of 1868. Except for the few changes concerning verbal structures and punctuation, the most significant ones made by Dickens relate to the name of the main character as, originally, she was intended to be called "Dorrit," and the title of the novel, which was supposed to be "Nobody's Fault". Following the tradition of his writings, *Little Dorrit* carries strong social themes and its central idea is supposed to be Dickens's bitter denunciation of the whole framework of government in his time. *Little Dorrit* was first published as a serial in monthly instalments from December 1855 to June 1857, with 40 illustrations by Hablot K. Browne ("Phiz") and it was first issued in book form in June 1857.

⁷ GOFFMAN, E. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1976.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13.

model for putting together serious versions of the same activity, and that, on occasion, we may not know whether it is play or the real thing that is occurring".⁹

This paradoxical characteristic of experience gives Goffman a means to base his concept of "frame" on the assumption that "definitions of a situation are build up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement with them."¹⁰ Thus, "frame" is the word used to indicate the basic elements subjectively identified within a given situation. Goffman's phrase "frame analysis"¹¹ refers to this type of examination of the organization of experience.

Although this theory is directed towards the analysis of "drama" its use here can be justified, for it enables us to scrutinize the way the literary work is technically developed in terms of structure and how the characters' interrelationship is arranged within it. This organization serves as the ruling scheme for the development and function of all the other structural elements, such as plot, characterization, point of view, space/time and action.

Goffman, by dealing with the relationship between the individual and the circumstance he is engaged in, proposes "to isolate some basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events and to analyse the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject".¹² He starts with

the fact that from an individual's particular point of view, while one thing may momentarily appear to be what is really going on, in fact what is actually happening is plainly a joke, or a dream, or an accident, or a mistake, or a misunderstanding, or a deception, or a theatrical performance, and so forth [...] attention [is]

⁹ GOFFMAN, p.7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10-11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.10.

directed to what it is about our sense of what is going on that makes it so vulnerable to the need for these various rereadings.¹³

In general terms, Goffman analyses the way an activity is perceived by its participants according to “primary frameworks”¹⁴ (social or natural), pointing out that such activity can suffer transformations which produces various layers of interpretation (rereadings) in an ongoing activity. The two basic types of transformations that can occur are: first, “keying”¹⁵ which is defined as a “systematic transformation” which can happen within an ongoing activity, a transformation which determines the individual’s perception of what is going on in that particular activity; second, “fabrications,” namely “the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a part of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what is it that is going on”.¹⁶ These frameworks are not subjective but are determined by the actions through which the activity is organized. Such actions are performed by social agents (fabricators). The organizational circumstances, which can suffer transformations and retransformations, are involved and the individual’s perceptions of such circumstances provide him with the understanding of what is going on around him/her in the social world.

Goffman also points out that the transformations which occur in a certain event are caused by the interference of external elements to this event. One of these elements is an “out-of-frame activity,”¹⁷ such as speech and behaviour mannerisms, which can influence the individual’s perception of an ongoing activity.

¹³ GOFFMAN, p.10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.83.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.201.

The environment in which an activity occurs or generates has also to be considered, which means that it is necessary to “anchor the activity”.¹⁸ This “anchoring” is done through spacial markers such as “episoding conventions”¹⁹—temporal/spatial brackets—which help to organize and define the activity.

When an activity is established it can cause two possible framings. First, the individual involved in it can have total awareness of the framework he participates or, second, he can be totally contained or deceived in it. In the latter case, some “ordinary troubles”²⁰ can occur in the framework created to trap him such as ambiguity, suspicion or doubt, which are generated by the misleading feature of the planned framework.

Apart from meaning, a frame also organizes involvement, which establishes the degree of “engrossment” the individual has in relation to the activity he is in. However, this same activity is liable to some disruptions, which cannot be ignored by those participating in it. Here, then, we have a “frame break”.²¹ The breaks can be caused by the loss of control of the human body or by the individual’s flooding out the activity.

The disturbing feature of these frame breaks causes “manufacture of negative experience”²² within the ongoing activity, which is marked by the embarrassment caused by those involved in it, whose behaviour threatens the frame of the ongoing activity, resulting in the disorganization of social interaction. Such disorganization, then, shows the individual’s “vulnerability of experience”²³ which indicates how the individual is vulnerable to his

¹⁸ GOFFMAN, p.247.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.251.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.300.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.345.

²² *Ibid.*, p.378.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.439.

interpretation of a certain event, which is created by the illusory traps of the context he is framed in.

As a final point, Goffman shows the relevance of the “frame analysis of talk,”²⁴ for the understanding of an activity is also based on the function of words as a source of misframing. The individual can either break the frame of physical activity through his action or through the way he produces his words.

In this work, Chapter I demonstrates how Goffman’s theory will enable us to analyse how the structural elements of the novel are organized into distinct but correlated literal frames. The concepts we borrow from his theory are, firstly, “episoding conventions,” which are employed to “anchor” a work of art in its environment, and which will be used to show how the *structure* of the novel, the literal framework, is build up. Here, the specific concepts to be used within episoding conventions are those related to, first, “beginning and ending brackets” and, then, “external” and “internal” brackets of the literary text. Secondly, *point of view* will be analysed according to Goffman’s comments on its various uses in the “novelistic frame”²⁵ (as opposed to theatrical frames). This approach will be complemented by Boris Uspensky’s theory of point of view in the novel in *A Poetics of Composition*,²⁶ since it also deals with point of view as a “framing device.” Uspensky’s theory will be further presented in 1.4. Thirdly, *space and time* will be regarded following the concepts of “spatial and temporal brackets”²⁷ as boundary markers within and outside the literary text, for they are also used as “anchoring” devices. Here, Goffman’s theory will be further enhanced by Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the “chronotope,” in his essay

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.496.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.150.

²⁶ USPENSKY, B. *A Poetics of Composition*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1983.

²⁷ GOFFMAN, p.251-252.

“Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,”²⁸ in order to explain the function of the main “settings” in the novel better. Bakhtin’s definition will be further analysed in 1.5. Fourthly, *action and interaction* will be analysed through the concepts that define how characters’ perception of primary frameworks is affected. The main concept is “fabrication,” in its several transformations within a framework. Such transformations will be analysed according to the interference they have through “out-of-frame activities,” “ordinary troubles,” “frame breaks,” “manufacture of negative experience,” “vulnerability of experience,” and the misframing caused by “talk.” These concepts and the “variations” they contain will be specifically analysed in 1.6.

The idea about the various ways and meanings of behaviour we are exposed to and how vulnerable we are when we perceive or try to understand such behaviour is of great importance to this analysis, for, in *Little Dorrit*, the characters’ behaviour is marked by different purposes and by different meanings. We will analyse how the characters who are directly involved in the schemes of the main ongoing activities are bound to fall into categories involved in the organization of experience developed by Goffman. We will show how easily they manipulate others or are manipulated themselves during the story and how such an attitude is part of the the inner workings of the novel as established by the author. This provides a means to deal with “social frameworks,” those in which we find motive and intent in the individual’s action.

In Chapter II, we will analyse the metaphorical implications of such frames for the deeper level of the structure of the novel. We will also demonstrate how literal and metaphorical frames, which appear to be “closed” in themselves, will be “broken” along the narrative, a fact that proves the “open”

²⁸ HOLQUIST, M (ed.) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, p.84.

characteristic of the novel. This openness will be further considered through its implications in a Victorian novel and how it affects our perception of the story as a whole, which will help us to highlight the author's hidden intentions behind the labyrinthine world of the novel. The conclusion reached here will be corroborated by the importance of graphics and their metaphorical meaning in this work.

CHAPTER I

1. Literal Frames: Establishment and Correlation

1.1. Dickens's Structural Strategy

This part of our work will show how structural elements such as plot, characterization, point of view, space/time and action are organized in terms of "literal frames". Such organization concerns the *surface level* of the narrative, the one which is to be regarded *objectively*, for its elements are in the foreground of the structure. The "establishment" of these frames is achieved through the analysis of how they are introduced and presented in Book I, which provides us with the means to further "correlate" them to those frames in Book II.

In "establishing" and "correlating" these literal frames we will simultaneously be gathering parallel and opposed elements embodied with the characteristics of "duality," which point to the existence of another level of narrative—the deeper/metaphorical—which, combined with the first, built up the structure which controls the seemingly chaotic elements in the novel.

In relation to the relevance of brackets in the artistic work, Goffman points out a difference between beginning and ending ones: "the bracket initiating a particular kind of activity may carry more significance than the bracket terminating it. For [...] the beginning bracket not only will establish an episode but also will establish a slot for signals which will inform and define what sort of transformation is to be made of the materials within the episode".¹

¹ GOFFMAN, p.255-256.

In *Little Dorrit* we find unifying and juxtaposed pairs of beginning and ending brackets, for Book I Chapter I has two functions: first, at a general level it represents the beginning bracket of the whole novel—a microscopic representation of structural and thematic elements—owing to the type of information it provides. The imagery related to the city, the prison, the prisoners’ relationship (master and mastered), and especially the game, which are recurrent themes within the novel. Second, at a specific level, it is the beginning bracket of Book I. The closing bracket in Book I, however, represents at the same time an “end” to Part I and a “transition” to Book II, which gives it a more specific function than that of the last chapter of Book II, for it has the sole function of “ending” Book II and the whole novel.

If compared to beginning ones, “closing brackets seem to perform less work, perhaps reflecting the fact that it is probably much easier on the whole to terminate the influence of a frame than to establish it. However, epilogues do try to summarize what has occurred and ensure the proper framing of it”.²

The juxtaposition of these two frames provides us with what is called the “calibrative functions of episodizing convention,” for

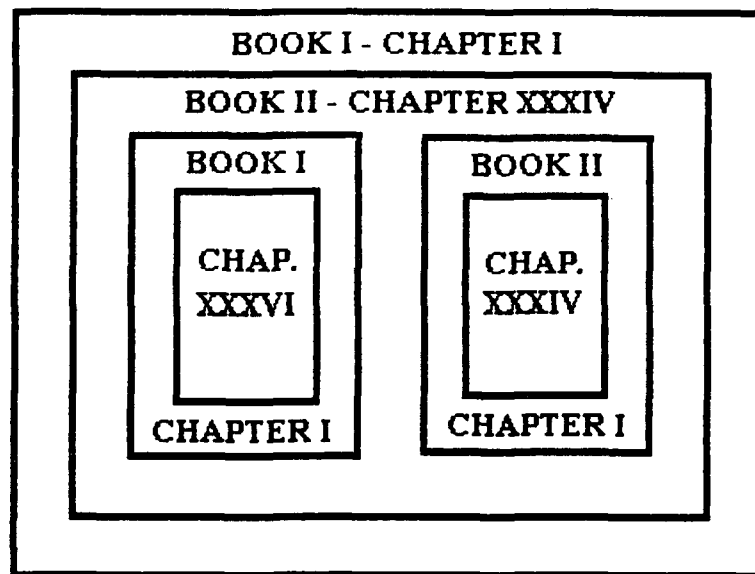
he who employs these devices often seems to rely on their power to reframe whatever comes after them (or before them in the case of epilogues) and seems to be somewhat on the hopeful side in this reliance. [Further,] insofar as “opening remarks” can set the stage and frame what follows, there is a reason why ‘getting the first word in’ might be considered strategically significant.³

The unifying and juxtaposed patterns formed by these brackets can be seen in Graphic I below:

² GOFFMAN, p.256.

³ *Ibid.*, p.256-257.

GRAPHIC I



Consequently, these brackets not only control the development of the novel but serve as devices for establishing the way the reader is to be led throughout it.

After analysing the “beginning and ending” brackets of the literary work, we can go further into its structure. In Graphic II, page 17, is demonstrated how the parts of the novel are built and framed within each other in terms of spatial/temporal representation and meaning. Besides chapters and titles, the writer also inserts *running titles* which serve as a type of *riddle* for what is to happen in the pages where they appear. On close examination we notice that each layer of the frame structure completes the previous one until we reach the last, the pictorial, which encloses all the meanings expressed in those preceding it. According to Goffman, the importance of the pictorial frame lies in the fact that “the space of a picture is experienced as a self-enclosed world; the *real* object interacts with everything that surges past or hovers around it”.⁴ In this sense, “the [fictional] world is restricted to the physical arena bracketed by

⁴ GOFFMAN, p.249, my italics.

the boundaries of the [book]”.⁵ Thus, these *pictures* function as three-dimensional representations of certain scenes within the story. Through these pictures the reader is able to grasp not only the physical boundaries of the story but characters’ appearance and, especially, expressions which add another level of interpretation to the narrative.

In Graphic II the brackets representing *parts* and *chapters* can be considered *external* as “in many activities internal ones occur, that is, brackets which mark brief pauses within an ongoing activity, the pauses to be held as time-out-of frame [...] the moments between scenes of [chapters], [or,] the break between [...] innings and halves”.⁶ This means that the *internal* brackets of Graphic II are the *titles*, *running titles* and *pictures* which mark pauses, frames, within the narrative. Each time the reader reaches one of them he is immediately “contained” in a different realm which induces him to try to discover *what is going on* in the story. Thus, the organization of the *surface level* shows how the *external bracketing* of the novel is formed by the parts that rule and combine its internal elements.⁷

Graphic II also shows how the dual characteristic of the structure of the novel (Part I and II) works as a starting point for guiding the reader to the ludic aspect⁸ which lies behind the form. The relevance of the visualization

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.252.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.260.

⁷ Lotman comments that “the essential and most traditional means of textually encoding rhetorical combinations is the compositional frame. A normal (that is, neutral) construction is based, in part, on the fact that the framing of the text [...] is extraneous to the text. Located outside the text’s boundaries, the frame warns of the initiation of the text” (LOTMAN, Y.M. “The Text within the Text.” PMLA, 109 (May 1994):383).

⁸ According to Hutchinson, “games with the reader may take three distinct forms. First, [...] the enigma, or mystery, [...] the author may conceal information within the text or simply suppresses it [...] second [...] the parallel, or series of parallels, which will illuminate the main strands, sometimes such parallels will be provided by conventional games—both social (like cards) or sporting (like baseball)—in which they function as an ‘interior duplication’ of the narrative [...] and] third, [...] the use of certain narrative devices [such as] the choice of a narrator who [...] provides insufficient information [...] or] an author may use different forms of narrative perspective within a single work” (HUTCHINSON, P. *Games Authors Play*. USA: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1983, p.23).

provided by the graphic lies in the fact that it resembles a “board game” in which the two parts of the novel work as “opponents,” where the author manoeuvres structural and thematic elements. This is corroborated by the fact that, in *Little Dorrit*, the brackets which surround and compose it form a structure built on “parallel,” a type of “game structure”⁹ in which the various layers, or frames, are established. At a *literal level*, the idea of the “game structure” is reinforced by the fact that we find a “draught-board, [...] a set of draughts, made of old buttons and soup bones [and] a set of dominoes” (p.2) in the prison cell, which establishes the relationship between the structural characteristic of the “game” with that of the novel. This “game-like” pattern will be further analysed in 1.6.1.

This dual characteristic perceived in Graphic II also denotes a “break” in terms of structure, for the division of the novel into two parts functions as the first “sign” of the various “breaks” which occur within the framework of the novel.

The analysis of the external/internal frame structure is significant because it shows how the author employs it in order to control the literal level of the narrative and the metaphorical one (as will be seen in Chapter II) and how the elements contained in it are to be perceived by the reader. Dickens, despite the impression of chaos he conveys in his novel, succeeds in leading his readers through a labyrinthine world, which is depicted through the dual forces of chaos and control. Although the reader might not be prepared to receive the amount of information that is poured into him during the novel, he may grasp the relationship and the hidden meaning inherent in it as soon as he realizes that the author intended to lead him to the physical complexity of his own world and to the complexity of ideas which characterized such a world. The playfulness which marks the way we are filled with information has to be compared to the

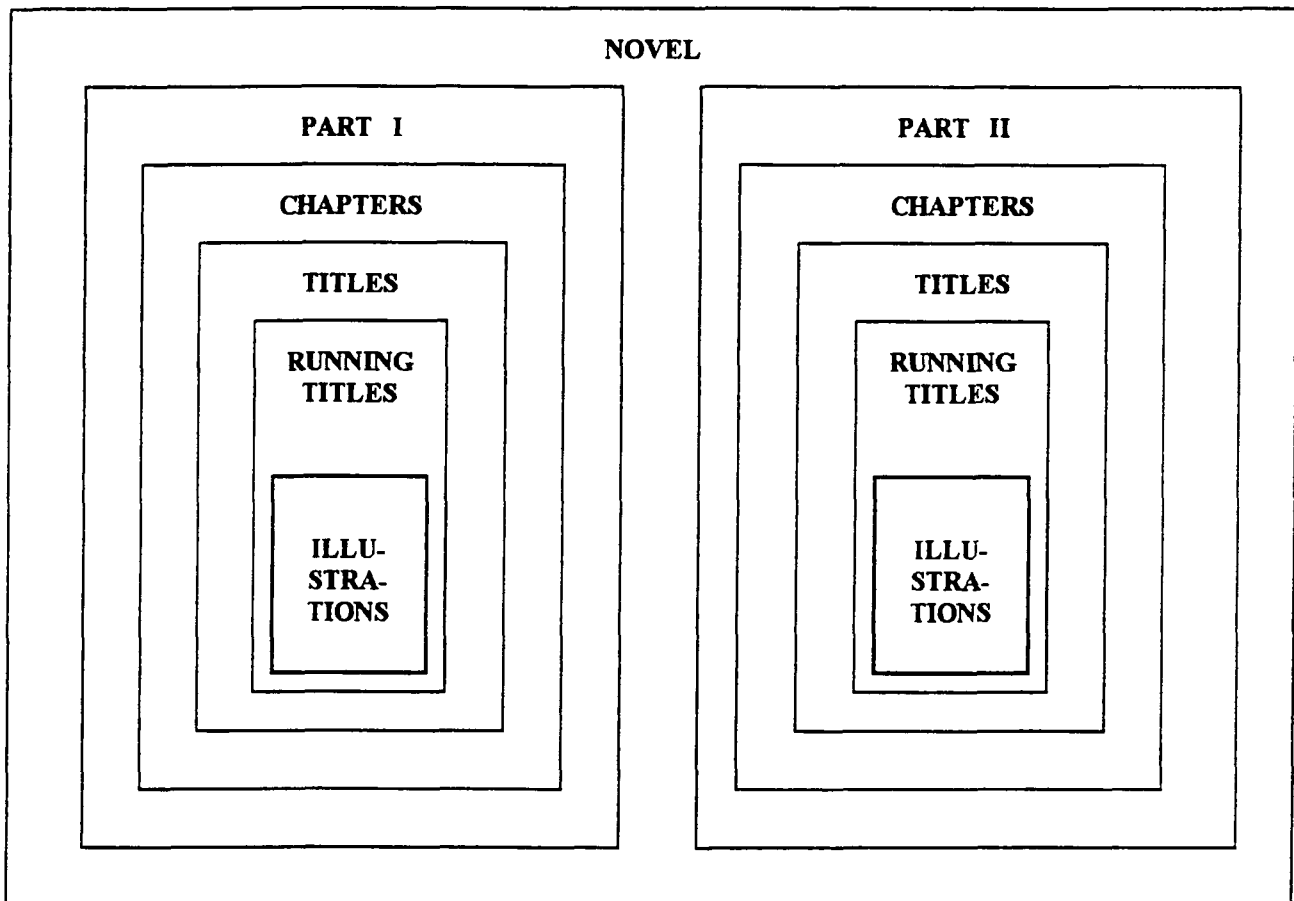
⁹ HUTCHINSON, p.23.

frenetic and chaotic amount of information such a society might have received and the way its inhabitants might have dealt with it.

Our next step is to analyse the relationship between the structure of the novel, as presented above, and the implications that the pattern it forms has for the development and for our perception of specific elements contained in *Little Dorrit*. Plot is the first element to be studied due to the importance it has for the understanding of the other structural elements to be analysed.

GRAPHIC II

External Bracketing



1.2. One Story: Double Plot in *Little Dorrit*

As occurs with many novels by Dickens, *Little Dorrit* is made up of a story which is built through two distinct plots and other interwoven subplots. This gives us important means to determine the way it is structured, for the world of *Little Dorrit* will become, at a surface level, a neatly patterned structure ruled by two leading forces and, at a deeper level, the reflexion of these forces in the other stories.

As Shklovsky already realized:

*Structurally, Dickens's novel moves simultaneously on several planes of action. The connection between the parallels is established either by involving the characters of one plot line in the actions of another plot line or by stationing them in the same place. Thus, we discover that the protagonists live within proximity of each other. [...] But a novel of this sort can only be told from the end. While we're reading the novel, we have before us a whole series of mysteries, not the least of which are the relationships among the protagonists which are also presented as mysteries. These mysteries are then interwoven with each other.*¹⁰

These *interwoven mysteries* are to be traced and interpreted in order to demonstrate the framework which is behind it all and to show how the characters' *several planes of action* are interpolated.

The novel starts with Arthur's returning home after his father's death in China, where they had lived together for twenty years on business. After his return Arthur starts asking his mother about a secret that might possibly be in the family and soon finds himself involved with Little Dorrit, whom he finds working in his mother's house as a seamstress. Through Little Dorrit, Arthur becomes acquainted with the underworld of the Marshalsea prison, with the labyrinthine world of the Circumlocution Office, where Barnacles and Merdles

¹⁰ SHKLOVSKY, V. *Theory of Prose*. USA: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991, p.124, my italics.

reign, and with the forgotten world of Bleeding Heart Yard, where Mr. Casby, the Patriarch, together with his servant Pancks, squeeze money from its inhabitants.

The *first plot line* of *Little Dorrit* is built through the Clennams, Arthur and his mother, Mrs Clennam, who is the centre of their household. Arthur's life, after being an exile, is geared towards independence from the family's business and from his mother's strict and oppressive control. Mrs Clennam, in her turn, maintains a stern posture towards life, business and the secret permeating the family until Blandois, the villain, blackmails her with it. The turning point in the Clennam's life occurs when Mrs Clennam reacts against Blandois's threat to disclose her secret and, at the same time, when Arthur, after going to prison, owing to risky financial enterprises, is rescued from it by Little Dorrit.

The *second plot line* pertains to the Dorrits, William, Frederick, Little Dorrit (Amy), Fanny and Edward (Tip), whose life is centred around William Dorrit, the father, who is imprisoned for debt at the Marshalsea prison. Owing to his past position in society, William tries to maintain a high status in prison, which forces his children, Amy (a seamstress), Fanny (a dancer) and Tip (an idler and wrongdoer), to find work outside the prison in order to support themselves and to keep him fed and clothed. Frederick Dorrit, the "ruined" uncle, a clarinet player, is another member of the family who helps William to appease the moral burden of imprisonment. All of them, however, are simultaneously dependent on Little Dorrit's efforts to provide the family with material and moral support. The Dorrit's life is also marked by a turning point, for they receive an unexpected fortune which releases them from life in the Marshalsea and puts them in contact with the higher sphere of society.

The link between the Dorrit and the Clennam families is rooted in the mystery and secret related to Arthur's birth, for he is the off-spring of an illicit

relationship between his father and a singer. The affair happened at the time Arthur's father was promised in marriage, by his uncle, Gilbert Clennam, to a stern, religious woman, who was to become Mrs Clennam. After being married for twelve months Mrs Clennam discovers the affair and the child becomes the instrument of punishment for his parents' sinful behaviour as Mrs Clennam, who was childless, forces the mother to give her the child and urges the father not to see his beloved anymore. However, after discovering what happened, Mr. Gilbert Clennam decides to give the girl a recompense for her suffering. As the singing girl happened to have a patron, who was Frederick Dorrit, the owner of the theatre in which Arthur's father met her, Mr. Gilbert Clennam adds a codicil to his will in which the sum of one thousand guineas was to be left to Arthur's real mother and one thousand guineas to the youngest daughter her patron might have at fifty, or, if he had none, to his brother's youngest daughter, on her coming of age. This same codicil is handed by Jeremiah Flintwinch, Mrs Clennam's servant and partner, to his twin brother, who later hands it to the villainous Rigaud who, through blackmail, is responsible for the dénouement of the story involving the secret, hence the link of the Dorrits to the Clennams.

These two plot lines lead us to the subplots which are introduced to us, *first*, through Arthur, who becomes acquainted with the Meagles (Mr. and Mrs Meagles, Pet and Tattycoram), an easy-going English family, whose father, Mr. Meagles, a retired banker, spends life travelling with his family. However, the Meagles experience a turning point in their lives when Tattycoram, a foundling, runs away with Miss Wade, an evil manipulator, and Pet, their daughter, marries Henry Gowan, an unscrupulous, decadent artist, who only wanted her money. Through this family, Arthur also meets his partner-to-be, Daniel Doyce, an engineer who tries to overcome the control of the Circumlocution Office, the civil service department in England. Arthur also leads us to the Patriarch, who has a selfish relationship with his daughter Flora,

Arthur's old sweetheart, with his servant and rent-collector Pancks and, especially, with the tenants of Bleeding Heart Yard. The Patriarch's life is also changed, for Pancks decides to unmask his benevolent, patriarchal attitude towards the Bleeding Hearts. *Second*, through Little Dorrit, we come to know the Barnacles (Barnacle Junior and, his father, Mr. Tite Barnacle) who dominated the Circumlocution Office and, consequently, were linked to Mr. Dorrit's imprisonment for debt; the Merdles (Mr. and Mrs Merdle and Mr. Sparkler) who show the way "money magnates" manoeuvre society, who become linked to the Dorrits owing to Fanny's marriage to Sparkler, and whose downfall is achieved through Mr. Merdle's suicide; the Plornishes (Sally and Mr. Plornish, the plasterer), who strive to survive the Patriarch's demands for money and whose fortune is also improved through the Dorrits' inheritance; we also meet Maggy, a mentally handicapped young woman, Little Dorrit's reliable companion and friend.

In this way, the two main streams of relationships are established through the two protagonists, that is, first, through Arthur Clennam and Mrs Clennam's mysterious link with the Dorrits, and, second, through Little Dorrit's link with the worlds of the Marshalsea prison, of the Circumlocution Office and of Bleeding Heart Yard. These relationships encircle all the possible knots which exist in the novel,¹¹ as seen in Graphic III and IV pages 23 and 24. These two sets of relationships also show the division of the society they lived in, namely, the foregrounded and the background society, as seen in Graphic V, page 25. Moreover, it gives us the parameters for understanding the fact that Arthur's and

¹¹ According to Hardy, "*Little Dorrit* [is a novel] of multiple action, organized not only by central symbols but by an *operatic intricacy of plot*, which slowly and mysteriously wound and rapidly unwound. [...] such plots cover a huge range of characters, and the mystery and final revelation involve almost everyone of importance. Separate threads of action, character and society are gathered up in action as well as symbolism and subject, and the last curtain can be economically inclusive. The plot takes in the love-story, the criminal adventure and the satire on institutions" (HARDY, B. *Charles Dickens - The Later Novels*. London: Longman, Gree & Co., 1968, p.28, my italics).

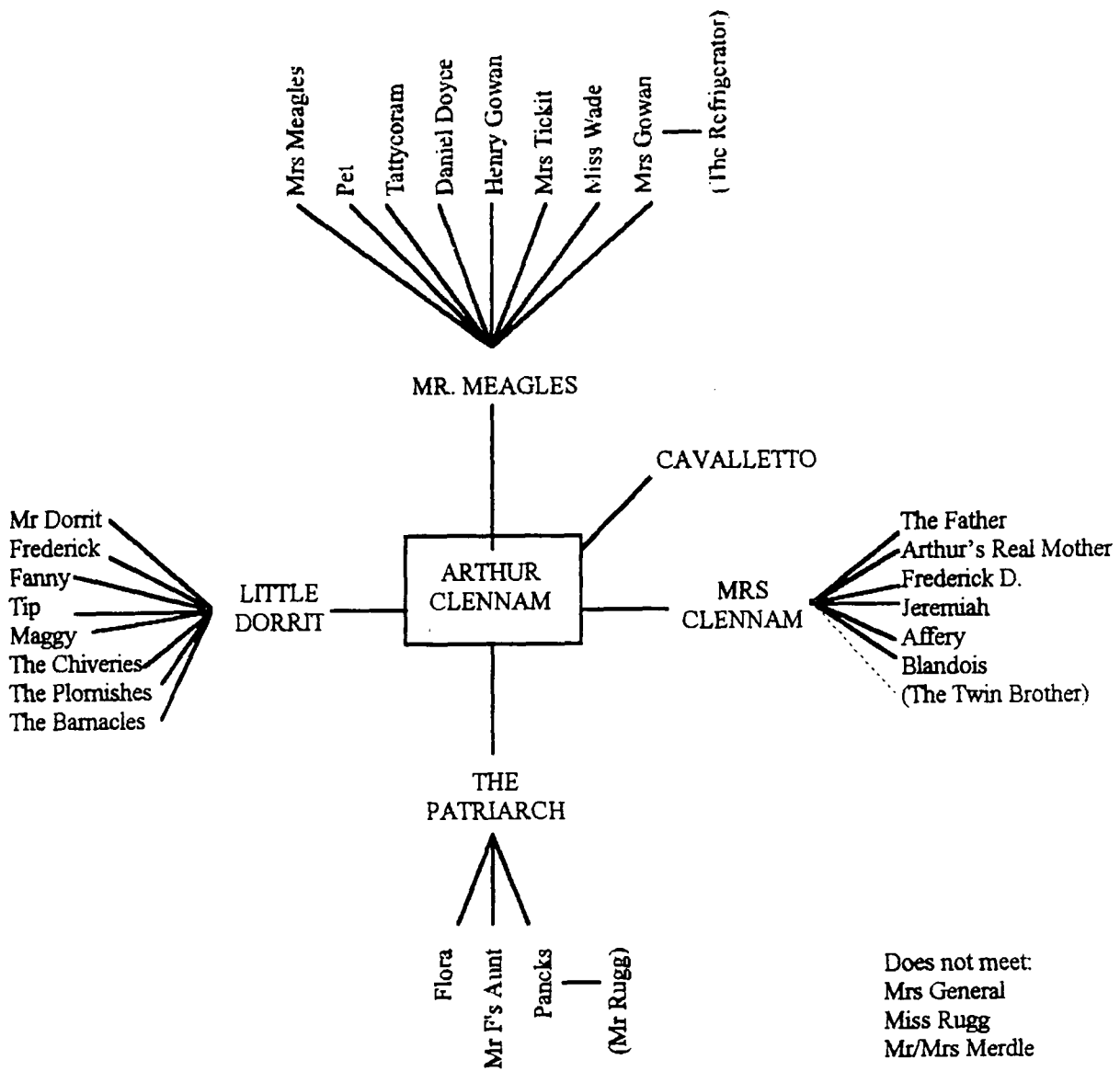
Little Dorrit's lives revolve around an axis—Mrs Clennam's secret—as shown in Graphic VI, page 26.

The analysis of plot and story also provides us with another “break” in the narrative, which corroborates the one already realized in terms of structure and the openness of the novel.

Characterization is the next structural element to be studied owing to the relevance of characters' presentation to the understanding of the other topics of this analysis.

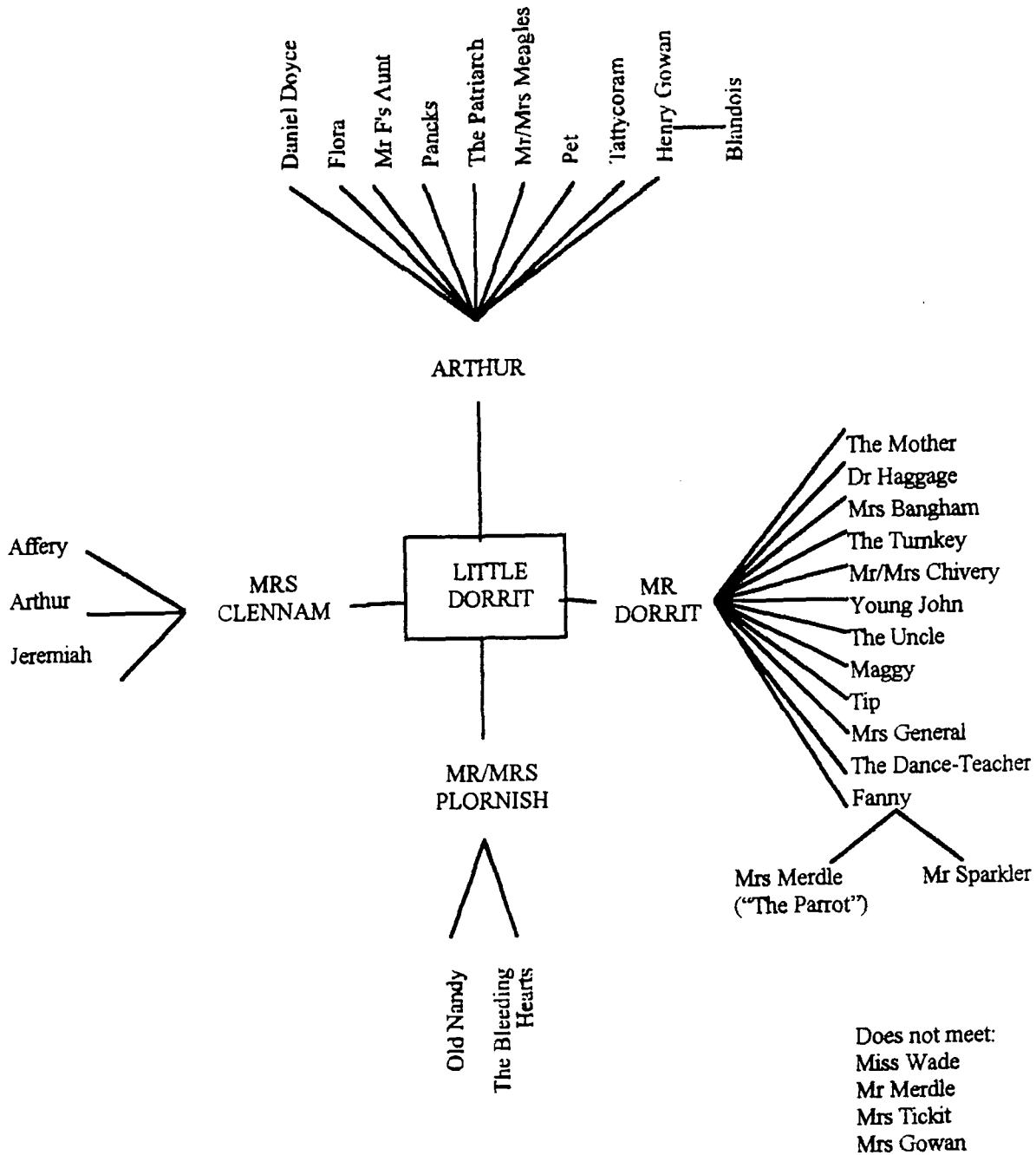
GRAPHIC III

Arthur's Scheme of Relationship with Other Characters



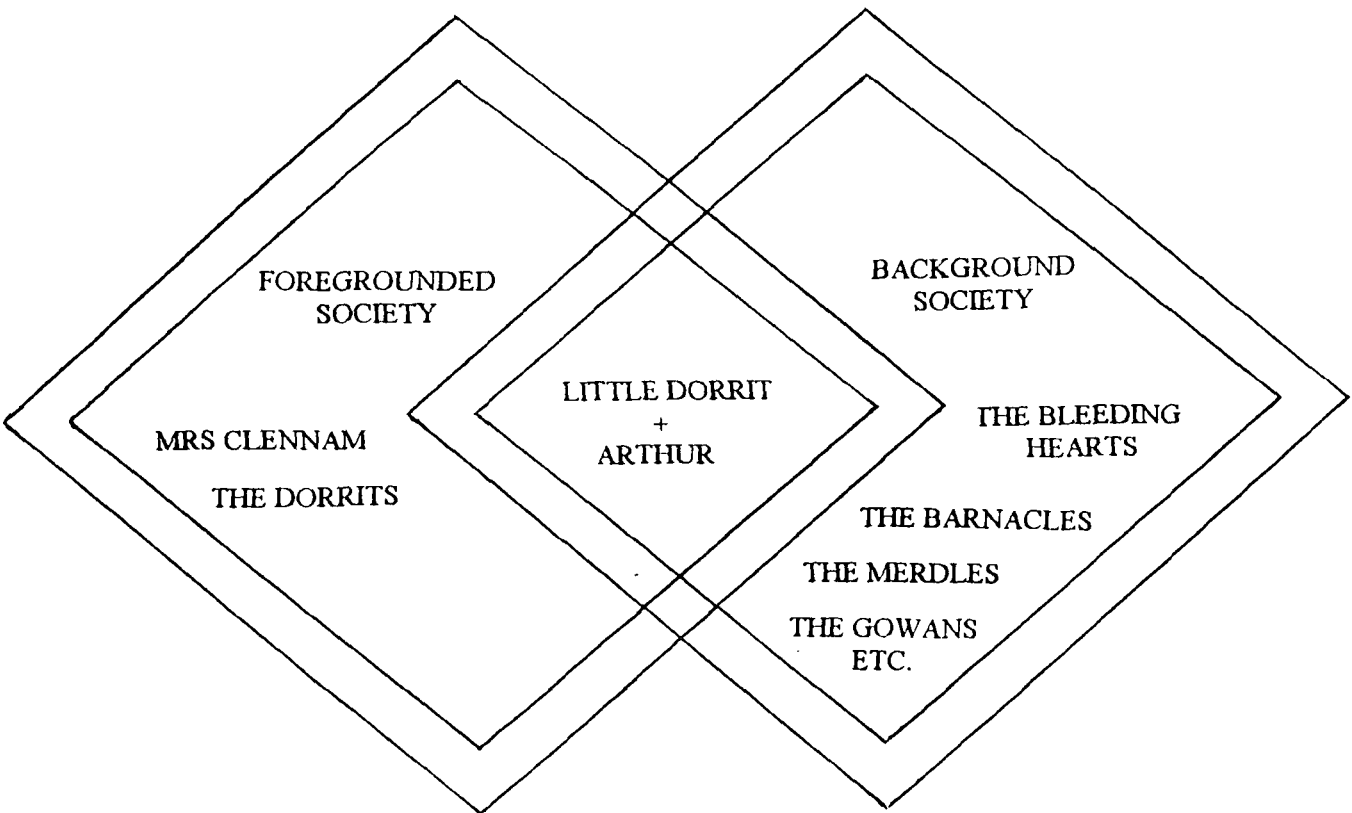
GRAPHIC IV

Little Dorrit's Scheme of Relationship with Other Characters



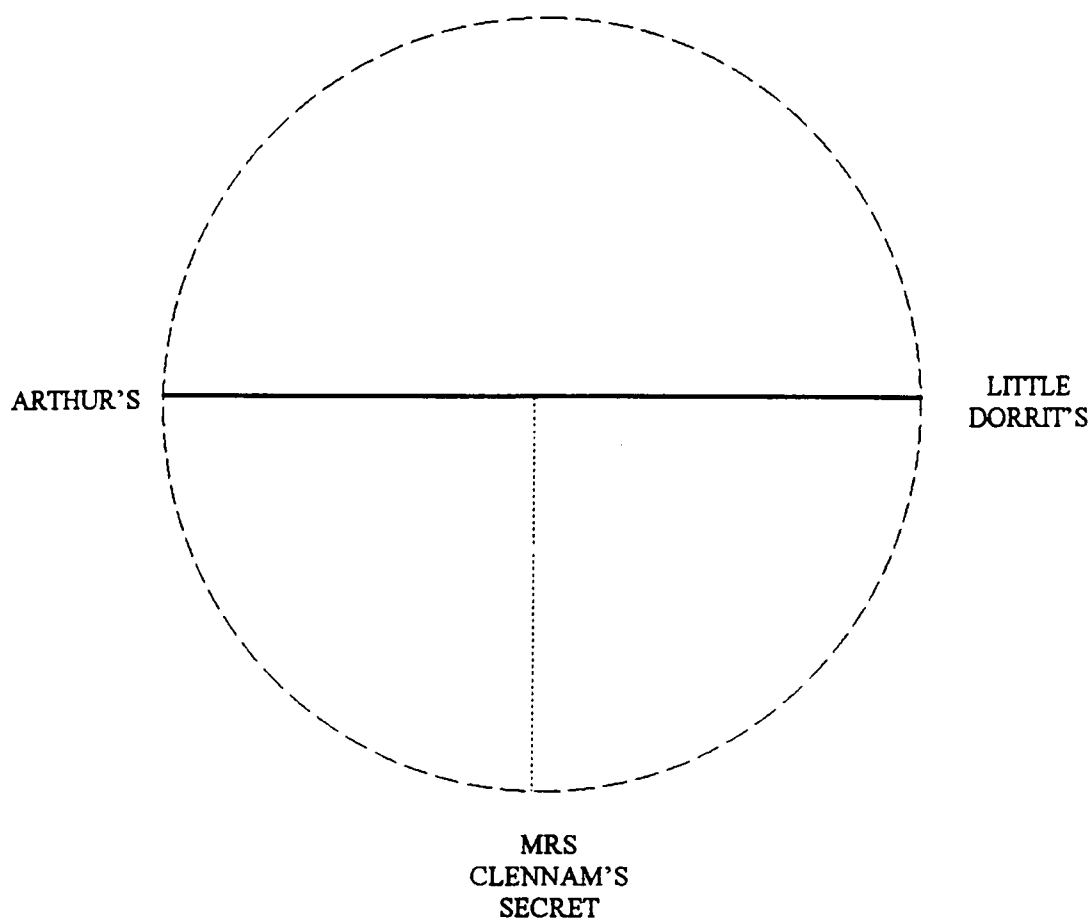
GRAPHIC V

The Intermingling of the Foregrounded and Background Societies



GRAPHIC VI

Arthur's and Little Dorrit's Lives Revolving around an "Axis"



1.3. A Mosaic of Characters

Arnold Bennett, in *The Journals of Arnold Bennett* (1931) said that “Dickens’s characters remain in the mind. They may perhaps be too conventionalized, too simplified [...] But they remain in the mind”.¹² This “unforgettable” characteristic is the idea to be exploited here, that is, the way characters are presented to us and why such presentation makes them what they are. Our point is not to discuss whether they are “too conventionalized [or] too simplified,” but to highlight the effect they have of helping in the formation of the novel as a whole and to throw light on its important elements, whether structural or thematic, through their individual qualities.

Dickens’s group of characters in *Little Dorrit* come to our mind like a mosaic, with its various coloured pieces, which can depict “anything [we] like best” (p.825). However, in order to understand the meaning and importance of each of these pieces within the complete picture—or clusters of pictures—they help to form, we have to scrutinize their shape, colour and material and the relationship established between them.

In order to present a more detailed account of the type of characterization employed by Dickens, characters will be divided into two frames: the major characters, directly involved in the main story line and the minor characters, providing the background against which the main story is developed. Despite having “characterization” as our main concern in this part of our analysis, some characters’ role will have to be pointed out owing to the relevance that some characters’ physical and psychological description has to the

¹² ALLOT, M. *Novelists on the Novel*. London: Routledge, 1977, p.290.

function they have in the story, for “description first forms a *nature*, then allows that nature to *perform*,”¹³ as will be seen in 1.6.

1.3.1. Major Characters

Following the two plot lines in the novel, the frame formed by the “major characters” will be subdivided into two other frames. On the one hand there are *the Clemmams*, on the other *the Dorrits*.

The Clemmams

In *the Clemmams’ frame*, the first character to be introduced is *Arthur Clemmam*, one of the protagonists of the novel. He is “a grave dark man of forty [...] an Englishman, who has been more than twenty years in China” (p.17-18). This brief description contains two of the most important features of Arthur’s character: his *grave* personality—a quality which triggers off a certain apprehension towards what must be hidden behind it—and the fact that he can be considered a *traveller*, an *outsider* in his own country, owing to a lengthy absence. These are the guidelines for the observation of this character and his development within the story.

In contrast to this brief outward description, one of the elements that marks Arthur’s importance within the novel is the fact that he is first presented through his own words, in a soliloquy-like speech:

‘I have no will. That is to say [...] next to none that I can put in action now. Trained by main force: broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine; shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father’s death there [...] always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be

¹³ GASS, W.H. “The Concept of Character in Fiction.” In HOFFMAN, M.J. & MURPHY, P.D. (eds.) *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1988, p.274.

expected from *me* in middle life? Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words.' (p.20)

Here we have the “grave” confession of a man who carries into adulthood the burden of an imposed life. Through the despondent tone of his words—“trained by main force,” “heavily ironed” and “exiled”—and the hopeless perspective he sees ahead of him, we grasp the inward struggle Arthur faces at this stage of life. So much discomfort can be further understood when Arthur reveals who was responsible for such a life, for his enforced exile:

'I am the son [...] of a *hard* father and mother. I am the only child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything; for whom what could not be weighed, measured, and priced, had no existence. Strict people as the phrase is, professors of a *stern* religion, their very religion was a *gloomy sacrifice* of tastes and sympathies that were never their own, offered up as part of a bargain for the security of their possessions. *Austere faces, inexorable discipline, penance* in this world and *terror* in the next—nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, and the void in my cowed heart everywhere—this was my childhood, if I may so misuse the word as to apply it to such a beginning of life.' (p.20-21, my italics)

The way Arthur's background is presented not only reinforces his desolate, grave state of mind when returning home, but also shows his own view of those who surrounded and guided (or misguided) him in his childhood. The juxtaposition of the quotes above, the *confessional tone* of the first and the *reproachful tone* of the second, helps us identify in Arthur the hero who will have to go through a deeper personal struggle in order to achieve “will, purpose and hope” in life. As seen in the story, this is the most difficult task he undertakes in life and the one which provides him with the means to develop.

Arthur's consciousness is further explored through his interaction with the physical world. This is achieved when Arthur arrives in London, for there is a clear relation between the character's psychological state and his surroundings:

Mr. Arthur Clennam, newly arrived from Marseilles by way of Dover, and by Dover coach the Blue-eyed Maid, sat in the window of a coffee house on Ludgate Hill. Ten thousand responsible houses surrounding him, frowning as heavily on the streets they composed, as if they were every one inhabited by ten young men of the Calender's story, who blackened their faces and bemoaned their miseries every night. Fifty thousand lairs surrounded him where people lived so unwholesomely, that fair water put into their crowded rooms on Saturday night, would be corrupt on Sunday morning. (p.28)

Arthur, on this Sunday evening in London, is as impressed by the "melancholy streets in a penitential garb of soot" (p.28) as by the "maddening church bells of all degrees of dissonance" (p.28) which fill the streets, for they set off in his mind a train of thought related to his childhood, his severe upbringing and "how [he had] hated this day" (p.29). Through this careful juxtaposition of character and environment we have an example of Dickens's mastery of the psychological treatment of a character, for Arthur's is the only one that suffered such development within *Little Dorrit*.

This inwardness attributed to Arthur's character also places him in a contrasting position in relation to the way other characters are presented; their inward traits are shown through their physical description and by a third person narrator.

When dealing with Arthur's character, we realize that the fact that the novel was to be called "Nobody's Fault" makes sense, since he is the very product of a "severe" up-bringing whose laws are justified by faults that are solely attributed to evildoers, to sinners and that the aim of such up-bringing is to prevent such faults from attracting other followers. Therefore Arthur's psychological struggle is nobody's fault, his lost childhood is nobody's fault, his sense of deep disappointment with himself is nobody's fault, and his struggle to find an "answer" to hidden secrets is, likewise, nobody's fault.

Closely linked to Arthur, we find *Mrs Clennam*, his mother, (or, rather, his step-mother, as we later come to know), a woman which is first portrayed as “put [...] beyond [all seasons...] with her *cold grey* eyes and her *cold grey* hair, and her *immovable* face, as *stiff* as the folds of her *stony* head-dress,—her being beyond the reach of the seasons, seemed but a fit sequence to her being beyond the reach of all changing emotions” (p.34, my italics). In analysing the qualifiers and the colour used in Mrs Clennam’s description we realize that her “stony-like features” not only resemble the brutal image of an immobile corpse, of someone buried in life, but also that of a shield used to protect her from the evil she sees in the outside world. Moreover, “her *severe* face had no thread of relaxation in it, by which any explorer could have been guided to the *gloomy* labyrinth of her thoughts” (p.45, my italics). Here we have a glimpse of Mrs Clennam’s essence from her emotionless face; her stern attitude hides the turmoil of a deranged mind in which outside reality is distorted into amorphous shape and erroneous interpretation. Although Mrs Clennam has “a strongly marked character [...and is] a remarkable woman [with] great fortitude—great strength of mind” (p.359), the sole intent of her life seems to be to act as an instrument of punishment, the minister of a stern religion which only recognizes sin and evil in another’s acts. The grimness of her external and inward life, the repression and oppression that her self-imposed imprisonment in a wheelchair inflicts on herself and others denote the absurdity and oddity of a life built on disillusionment and despair. Mrs Clennam’s appearance is a kind of emblem of reproach to others’ deceitful behaviour and a reflexion of her own inner struggle to come to terms with her inexorable being.

The Dorrits

In the *second frame* of major characters, that of *the Dorrits*, the first member of the family to be introduced is *Little Dorrit*, also known as Amy

Dorrit, also called “the Child of the Marshalsea,” someone strongly linked to the household mentioned above. Little Dorrit is first referred to as “nothing [...] a whim” (p.40), by Affery, as if we were meant to dismiss any possible interest in her character. That idea can be further reinforced by her

diminutive figure, small features, and slight spare dress, [which] gave her the appearance of being much younger than she was. A woman, probably of not less than two-and-twenty, she might have been passed in the street for little more than half that age. Not that her face was very youthful, for in truth there was more consideration and care in it than naturally belonged to her utmost years; but she was so little and light, so noiseless and shy, and appeared so conscious of being out of place among the hard elders, that she had all the manner and much of the appearance of a subdued child. (p.52, my italics)

Through the qualifiers used in her description we are induced to regard Little Dorrit as a “tiny little thing” which deserves care and pity. However, her physical description provides us with the opposite idea of what she really is, that is, an industrious “little” woman whose eagerness and character represent the driving force within the story. Little Dorrit’s description represents a paradox in relation to that of characters whose outward appearance resembles their inward life. Here, her “diminutive figure” counterbalances her strong personality and will. Little Dorrit, in spite of her role as a protagonist, together with Arthur, receives a different treatment in relation to physical description; that is, while Arthur is psychologically oriented in relation to the story and has little outward description, Little Dorrit’s characterization is more oriented towards her behaviour and action, which constitute one of the leading features of the story. Here we notice one of the aspects in which these two characters complete each other’s role, for one is a “dreamer” (Arthur) and the other is a “doer” (Little Dorrit), as will be further analysed in 1.6.

Paradoxically, especially in Arthur’s eyes “[the] little creature seemed so young [...], that there were moments when he found himself thinking of her,

if not speaking to her, as if she were a child. Perhaps he seemed as old in her eyes as she seemed young in his" (p.95). However, this "whim," this insignificant little creature, embodies one of the strongest personalities within the novel and behaves magnificently.

In Little Dorrit's case Dickens also uses one of his preferred devices for characterization, that is, name, for it represents the "expression of a character's personality, and the reader is expected to recognize this and to make certain deductions from it: not only is he expected to predict the fundamental traits of the character in question, but also his likely behaviour. Names offer clues, in other words, which we must interpret".¹⁴ However, if Dickens's reader is expected to "recognize [...] and to make certain deductions" about Little Dorrit's personality from her name, he seems to be the victim of a trick, for Little Dorrit is the antithesis of what her name appears to indicate.

Little Dorrit, then, takes us to her family, and the first figure to be presented to the reader is her father, *Mr. William Dorrit*, who is introduced to us in his early days, when he first came to the Marshalsea prison, as "a shy, retiring man; well-looking, though in an effeminate style; with a mild voice, curling hair, and irresolute hands—rings upon the fingers in those days—which nervously wandered to his trembling lip a hundred times" (p.58). William's description shows us the personality of an insecure man who avoids accepting his position as a prisoner by clinging to a refined appearance. This characteristic is reinforced, for, as time passed by, "the rings had begun to fall from the debtor's irresolute hands" (p.62) and "the shabby old debtor with the soft manner and white hair [became] the Father of the Marshalsea" (p.65), a title that nourished his pride and vanity and helped him to keep a distinguished status in prison.

¹⁴ HUTCHINSON, p. 79.

Within the Dorrit frame, apart from two other children, *Fanny*, the “wayward sister,” a dancer, and *Edward* “[the] idle brother” (p.69), we still have “a ruined uncle” (p.74), *Frederick Dorrit*,

ruined by his brother, the Father of the Marshalsea, and knowing no more how than his ruiner did, but accepting the fact as an inevitable certainty [...] Naturally a retired and simple man [...] He had been a very indifferent musical amateur in his better days; and when he fell with his brother, resorted for support to playing a clarionet as dirty as himself in a small Theatre Orchestra. (p.74)

Frederick, “Dirty Dick” (p.95), is as much a character of immutable goodness as Little Dorrit, one that quietly and steadily, supports the family’s downfall with the genuine dignity that Mr. Dorrit, Fanny and Edward lack. If we compare the passage above with his closely-described appearance below, we see that both reflect not only simplicity and shabbiness but the unpretentious personality of someone who does not change with circumstances:

He was [always] *dirtyly* and *meanly* dressed, in a *threadbare* coat, once blue, reaching to his ankles and buttoned to his chin, where it vanished in the *pale ghost* of a velvet collar. A piece of red cloth with which that phantom had been *stiffened* in its lifetime was now laid bare, and poked itself up, at the back of the old man’s neck, into a confusion of grey hair and rusty stock and buckle which altogether nearly poked his hat off. A *greasy* hat it was, and a *napless*; impending over his eyes, *cracked and crumpled* at the brim, and with a wisp of pocket-handkerchief dangling out below it. His trousers were so *long* and *loose*, and his shoes so *clumsy* and *large*, that he shuffled like an elephant; though how much of this was gait, and how much trailing cloth and leather, no one could have told. (p.79, my italics)

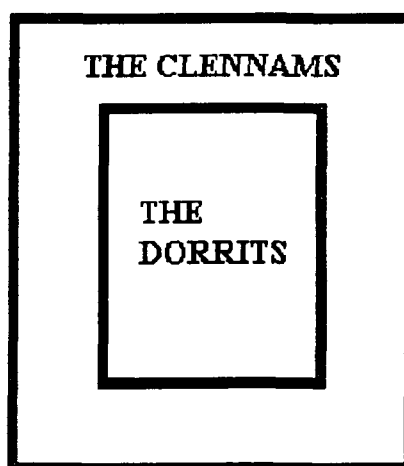
The shabbiness and looseness implied through the qualifiers used in Frederick’s physical description emphasize the degree of detachment he seems to maintain in relation to the outside world. This is also observed through the ghost-like characteristic of his clothes, as if he might suddenly vanish from the physical world. Frederick’s description is also relevant as he represents a

contrast with his brother William. Concerning their appearance, “the brothers, walking up and down the College-yard together, were a memorable sight. *Frederick the free, was so humbled, bowed, withered, and faded; William the bond, was so courtly, condescending, and benevolently conscious of a position;* that in this regard only, if in no other, the brothers were a spectacle to wonder at” (p.221, my italics). This difference is not restricted just to appearance and behaviour, for the two brothers stand as foils to each other—a contrast which is necessary in order to render, at least to one of them, the idea of superiority and mastery. Frederick, as will be seen later, carries within himself the integrity which his brother lacks, for he is the only one to show recognition and awareness of Little Dorrit’s role in the family. Again, Dickens almost misleads us while describing a character for, in the same sense as Little Dorrit, Frederick is shown through a perspective which blurs our first impression of his inner traits and of the importance he plays in relation to those who surround him. That accounts for the importance given to his physical description.

The frames of major characters can be seen in Graphic VII:

GRAPHIC VII

MAJOR CHARACTERS



The analysis of these major characters provides us with clues that will help us to evaluate their function and performance in the story and their behaviour towards other characters. The central framework they establish in terms of characterization represents the starting point for the analysis to be made in relation to the frame of the *minor characters*, which form the background framework of the story.

1.3.2. Minor Characters

The frame of minor characters will be divided into several frames which will be identified during our analysis. The first frame to be considered is that composed by *Rigaud* and *Cavalletto* owing to their introduction at the beginning of the story.

Monsieur Rigaud Lagnier Blandois is first introduced in the novel as a man who “lays on the ledge” (p.3) of the grating in prison and wears a “great cloak [...] heavily upon him” (p.3). Thus, we are given the first symbolic element about this man: the “cloak”. As a garment the cloak means protection, but it also denotes concealment, mystery and villainy. Therefore, it represents its owner’s personality, and his “hidden” features, such as Rigaud’s intentional playful behaviour. Rigaud is also described as being “waiting to be fed [like] a wild beast” (p.3), an animal-like creature that is kept in a “cage”. The emphasis given to his physical features is focused mainly on “his eyes, too close together [...], sharp rather than bright—pointed weapons with little surface to betray them. They had no depth or change; they glittered, and they opened and shut” (p.3). In sum, his eyes can be said to express his inward side: cool, indifferent, unrevealing. In addition, “he had a hook nose [...] too high between the eyes [...] he was large and tall in frame, had thin lips [...] thick moustache [...] a quantity of dry hair, of no definable colour [...] shot with red. The hand [...] was

unusually small and plump, [which] would have been unusually white but for the prison grime” (p.3).

Rigaud’s description provides us with more than just information about his appearance; it also gives us elements which will later reinforce his personality and his actions. First, his face is highly emphasized, and this is the most changeable part of his body (as will be seen in 1.6); second, his hand “unusually small and plump”—which is strongly contrasted with his “large and tall frame—is mentioned throughout the novel, indicating Rigaud’s “tactful” manoeuvres towards others. This is Rigaud’s portrait as a man of various facets and hidden traits.

Dickens also employs precise qualifiers in relation to Rigaud, for he is markedly “cruel” and “proud,” as much as Miss Wade, which could help to explain their connection in the novel. He is “five-and-thirty years of age” (p.9) and he describes himself as being sensitive and brave.

John Baptist Cavalletto is “the other man [who] was lying on the stone floor [and who was] covered with a coarse brown coat” (p.3). After reading this first comment on Cavalletto we notice that Rigaud and he are introduced through the image of a “cloak” and a “coat”—garments which are alike but that carry different connotation, for the cloak “hides” while the coat “protects”—therefore, Rigaud’s cloak is “heavily upon him” and Cavalletto is just “covered” by his coat. Through this first contrasting description we are shown the difference established between Cavalletto and Rigaud. Cavalletto is placed in a lower position, which denotes his “submissive manner” and inferiority in relation to Rigaud. However, in his cheerfulness and “lively look” (p.4) we perceive the goodness that the other lacks. Unlike Rigaud’s, Cavalletto’s clothes are described, which means that he had nothing to hide or cover. He is presented as

[a] sunburnt, quick, lithe, little man, though rather thick-set [earrings] in his brown ears, white teeth lighting up his grotesque brown face, intensely black hair [...] about his brown throat, a ragged red shirt open at his brown breast [loose], seaman-like trousers, decent shoes, a long red cap, a red sash round his waist, and a knife in it. (p.4)

Throughout the descriptions found in the novel, we perceive that one of the ways in which Dickens reveals his characters is through *colours*. While describing them he also shows the importance of their outward aspect, for their psychological traits are to be identified in these external details. In Rigaud's case, he is covered in *black* despite his *white* complexion, a contrast which can be related to his dual, "playful" personality. Moreover, even the colours used to portray Rigaud and Cavalletto stress the contrast between them. Cavalletto has a *sunburnt* skin while "there is no *whiteness* in all the hues under the sun at all like the whiteness of Monsieur Rigaud's face" (p.13, my italics), which clearly shows who is the one that does not fear the sun, this "great flaming jewel of fire" (p.1) and the one who "hides" from it. Cavalletto is also defined by "strong," "warm" colours, such as *brown* and *red*, while Rigaud has "no definable colour" (p.3) applicable to him apart from a "shot [of] red" (p.3) in his hair and the "coolness" of white in his hands and face, which are clearly contrasted with his black cloak. In addition, the contrasting features of black and white will later show its meaning during the analysis of his actions. These different shades of colour, that is, the fact that some are intensely strong and others intentionally dim, characterize the originality and truthfulness of one and the "playfulness" of the other. Moreover, Cavalletto is said to be the "little bird," gentle and harmless. We can clearly see that "in his submission, in his lightness, in his good humour, in his short-lived passion, in his easy contentment with hard bread and hard stones, in his ready sleep, in his fits and starts, [he is] altogether a true son of the land that gave him birth" (p.14).

The second frame of minor characters is that formed by *the Flintwinches*, the couple of servants who attend Mrs Clennam, for Mrs Clennam, despite her fortitude and severity, desperately needs support in order to fulfil her domineering role at home. She finds support in *Jeremiah Flintwinch*, her servant and, later on, partner. Despite his subordinate position, Jeremiah has immeasurable power in the Clennams' household owing to his direct control over his mistress, Mrs Clennam. The first description we have of Jeremiah is that of "an old man; *bent and dried*, but with *keen eyes*" (p.31, my italics). Such characteristics reveal a cunning and unscrupulous being, for no possible aspect of Mrs Clennam's house and business escapes this "keen-eyed old man" (p.37). Jeremiah may be "bent and dried" owing to years of service but his mind continues as sharp as ever, as can be seen in the course of the story. As a minor character Jeremiah is presented through a full physical description, a detailed account of the type he represents is clearly explored through his outward aspect:

He was a short, bald old man, in high-shouldered black coat and waistcoat, drab breeches, and long drab gaiters. He might, from his dress, have been either clerk or servant, and in fact had long been both. There was nothing about him in the way of decoration but a watch, which was lowered into the depths of its proper pocket by an old black ribbon, and had a tarnished copper key moored above it, to show where it was sunk. His head was awry, and he had a *one-sided, crab-like way* with him, as if his foundations had yielded at about the same time as those of the house, and he ought to have been propped up in a similar manner. (p.32, my italics)

The relevance of this description lies in the fact that Flintwinch is a character who intrigues and disturbs us from the beginning with his awkward, weird appearance, which reflects the sinuous manoeuvres of his actions. Moreover, his "one-sided, crab-like way" clearly denotes the attitude he adopts

towards others, that is, he moves sideways in a careful and indirect manner in order not to attract attention to his real intentions (see 1.6). Further,

his neck was so *twisted*, that the knotted ends of his white cravat usually dangled under one ear; his natural acerbity and energy, always contending with a second nature of habitual repression, gave his features a *swollen and suffused* look; and altogether, he had a *weird* appearance of having hanged himself one time or other, and of having gone about ever since halter and all, exactly as some timely hand cut him down. (p.37, my italics)

Jeremiah's nightmarish, hideous description, besides provoking curiosity, also repels us, for it externalises his misleading inner self and the haunting way he has in Mrs Clennam's house. Paradoxically, in Mrs Clennam's opinion he was "a sensible man, and a trustworthy man, and a persevering man, and a pious man" (p.39), qualities that will later be checked against his actions; a man whose cunning manipulation could "conquer even [Mrs Clennam]" (p.36), as his wife puts it.

Apart from Mr. Flintwinch, there is Mrs Flintwinch, or *Affery*, who is first introduced as "an old woman [with a] cracked voice" (p.34), and this "cracked" quality of her voice can be clearly understood during the development of her character for, as we will see, "[Mrs Clennam and Jeremiah,] "them two clever ones"—Mrs Affery's perpetual reference, in whom her personality was swallowed up" (p.53), had a way of muffling her voice inside the house. This happens because of one of Affery's weaknesses, "though a tall hard-favoured sinewy old woman, who in her youth might have enlisted in the Foot Guards without much fear of discovery, [was to collapse] before the little keen-eyed crab-like old man" (p.37). In relation to Affery, Dickens does not spend much time on physical description, for what matters is her theatrical behaviour and the effective results of her action, as will be considered in 1.6.

Another frame of minor characters is composed of *the Meagles*—Mr. and Mrs Meagles, Pet and Tattycoram. *Mr. Meagles*, a retired banker, and his wife, *Mrs Meagles*, are “comely and healthy, with [...] pleasant English [faces] which had been looking at homely things for five-and-twenty or more, and shone with a bright reflection of them” (p.16); these two characters present themselves as being “practical people” (p.17) a doubtful quality owing to their way of dealing with family matters. In the Meagles family we find *Minnie*, “*Pet*,” one of their surviving twin daughters, who

was about twenty. A fair girl with rich brown hair hanging free in natural ringlets. A lovely girl, with a frank face, and wonderful eyes; so large, so soft, so bright, set to such perfection in her kind good head. She was round and fresh and dimpled and spoilt, and there was in Pet an air of timidity and dependence which was the best weakness in the world, and gave her the only crowning charm a girl so pretty and pleasant could have been without. (p.16)

Pet is a character who seems unreal, for she embodies all the good traits expected to be found in a refined young lady. Even her name clearly expresses the way she is treated by her parents and those surrounding her, which reinforces her timid and dependent nature. Juxtaposed to Pet’s “unreal personality,” we meet, within this family, *Tattycoram*, “a handsome girl with lustrous dark hair and eyes, and very neatly dressed” (p.17), who is an orphan, and “a little maid to Pet”. *Tattycoram*’s name arouses great curiosity because, as Mr. Meagles explains to Arthur,

she was called in the Institution, Harriet Beadle—an *arbitrary name*, of course. Now, Harriet we changed into Hattey, and then into Tatty, because, as practical people, we thought even a *playful name* might be a new thing to her, and might have a softening and affectionate kind of effect, don’t you see? As to Beadle, that I needn’t say was wholly out of question. If there is anything that is not to be tolerated on any terms, anything that is a type of Jack-in-office insolence and absurdity, anything that represents in coats, waistcoats, and big sticks, our English holding-on by nonsense, after every one has found it out, it is a beadle. You

haven't seen a beadle lately? [...] The name of Beadle being out of the question, and the originator of the Institution for these foundlings having been a blessed creature of the name of Coram, we gave that name to Pet's little maid. At one time she was Tatty, and at one time she was Coram, until we got into a way of mixing the two names together, and now she is always Tattycoram. (p.18-19, my italics)

The process of construction of Tattycoram's name shows again Dickens's preoccupation regarding *names* and what they represent to the characters and reveal about their psychological traits. Tattycoram is that type of character who is divided between moral truths and selfish hatred towards those who try to help her. Apart from that, this playfulness regarding the making of her name shows that the "softening and affectionate kind of effect" expected by the Meagles works in reverse, for it sets off the opposite result in Tatty. If we split Tattycoram's name in three parts and analyse, first, their individual meaning, and then the relationship established between them, we come to some understanding about the nature of Tatty's character. The first part, "tatty," which means "old and in bad condition,"¹⁵ is linked to "co," which means "together"¹⁶ and, finally, with "ram,"¹⁷ which as a verb means to force something on someone, especially an idea or opinion. The meaning found within the words "affectionately" chosen to form her name reveals that Tatty is, first, "unconsciously" forced to carry the burden of the old idea of a rejected foundling, which is reinforced by her condition as a maid to Pet, and, second, she is forced to accept the life and name the Meagles found could suit her best. Here, then, we reach the core of this girl's hatred and the behaviour she displays throughout the story. Thus, this young, unpretentiously-named foundling is not a subdued character. Her nature is strong and forceful, she "[detests] the name

¹⁵ PROCTER, P. *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.1492.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.251.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1171.

[and] hates [Pet]" (p.26), and her hatred leads her towards one of the most evil characters in the novel, Miss Wade.

Miss Wade, who belongs to an isolated frame of minor characters, is presented to us as "a reserved Englishwoman [...] a solitary young lady" (p.23). In the Quarantine Quarters, where she first appears—Miss Wade is together with Arthur, the Meagles and "a tall French gentleman" (p.22). Dickens, in order to emphasize the mystery involving her character and beauty, places her in the shadow, a shadow that is clearly related to her inner disposition which fell

like a *gloomy veil* across her forehead, [...] One could hardly see her face, so *still* and *scornful*, set off by the arched *dark* eyebrows, and the folds of *dark* hair, without wondering what its expression would be if a change came over it. That it could soften or relent, appeared next to impossible. That it could deepen into anger or any extreme of defiance, and that it must change in that direction when it changed at all, would have been its peculiar impression upon most observers. It was dressed and trimmed into no ceremony of expression. Although not an open face, there was no pretence in it. I am *self-contained* and *self-reliant*; your opinion is nothing to me; I have no interest in you, care nothing for you, and see and hear you with indifference—this is said plainly. It said so in the *proud* eyes, in the *lifted* nostril, in the handsome, but *compressed* and even *cruel* mouth. Cover either two of those channels of expression, and the third would have said so still. Mask them all, and the mere turn of the head would have shown an unsubduable nature. (p.23-24, my italics)

The effect Dickens achieves while revealing Miss Wade's facial expression is more profound than that suggested by a mere description. The qualifiers employed and the *hues* they produce in the picture we are urged to visualize show much more than a shadowy or gloomy attitude. They scrutinize the depths of a malignant, dark being, and show, at the same time, a character who is not only self-destructive but appears to be ready to destroy other people whenever possible. Miss Wade is "somebody's child—anybody's—nobody's [...] a woman more angry, passionate, reckless, and revengeful never lived" (p.540). She is, then, this stone-like, "compressed" and "repressed" creature,

one of the characters that makes us feel uneasy owing to the signs of her stern, mysterious appearance, which will later be confirmed in her interaction with other characters, especially Tattycoram and Rigaud.

Another isolated frame is composed of *Mr. Henry Gowan*, an artist, who is indirectly linked to Miss Wade (as we come to know) but directly linked to the Meagles, for he is Pet's husband-to-be. Mr. Gowan is "barely thirty [...] well dressed, of a sprightly and gay appearance, a well-knit figure, and a rich dark complexion [...] This Gowan [...] appeared to be an artist by profession, [...] yet he had a slight, careless, amateur way with him—a perceptible limp, both in his attainments" (p.201-205). In this description, the way Mr. Gowan is referred to, that is, "This Gowan," shows how unimportant the narrator seems to consider him. Moreover, Gowan has no definite profession; he "appeared to be an artist" who, compared to Daniel Doyce, seems to betray the ideal of the artistic profession instead of respecting it. It is possible to detect here one of the criticisms made in the novel—the careless and prejudiced way the arts are treated in society and how vulnerable the arts are to the demands of the period they belong to. Art, in one sense, not only depends on the real artist (Doyce) to be developed and recognized but it is also betrayed by those who explore it on a vile way (Gowan). Mr. Gowan is one of those characters whose description is overshadowed by his actions (see 1.6).

Another frame of characters is that headed by *Mr. Casby*, old Christopher Casby, "the Patriarch," which includes Flora, Pancks and Mr F's Aunt.

The unchangeable figure of *the Patriarch* is introduced in the following way:

a man advanced in life, whose smooth grey eyebrows seemed to move to the ticking as the fire-light flickered on them, sat in an armchair, with his list shoes on the rug, and his thumbs slowly revolving over one another. This was old Christopher Casby [...]

as unchanged in twenty years and upward, [...] Perhaps there never was a man, [...] so troublesome for the imagination to picture as a boy. [...] in the room in which he sat, was a boy's portrait, [...] Master Christopher Casby, aged ten [...] There was the same smooth face and forehead, [...] calm blue eye, [...]and] placid air. The shining bald head, which looked so very large because it shone so much; and the grey hair at its sides and back, like floss silk or spun glass, which looked so very benevolent because it was never cut; were not, of course, to be seen in the boy as in the old man. Nevertheless, in the Seraphic creature [...] were clearly to be discerned the rudiments of the Patriarch with the list shoes. (p.145-146)

In the quote above, Dickens emphasizes the “unchangeable” quality in this angel-like figure. This is done because in twenty years the Patriarch's appearance has not changed, and in the same way he does not change his stingy attitude towards the Bleeding Hearts. Moreover, the Patriarch is presented through the comparison of himself with his picture when aged ten, hinting at the duality that permeates this old man's personality. In other words, his benevolent, child-like expression hides a stone-like, money-oriented and far from benevolent character. So this is the man who is called “The Last of the Patriarchs. So grey, so slow, so quiet, so impassionate, so very bumpy in the head, Patriarch was the word for him” (p.146).

As in almost all his characters, Dickens highlights one physical feature,¹⁸ such as Rigaud's “white hands” and Mr. Dorrit's “irresolute fingers;” this time, the patriarchal “head” is emphasized; as it stands for the idea created around it, for

philanthropists of both sexes had asked who he was, and on being informed, ‘Old Christopher Casby, formerly Town-agent to Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle,’ had cried in a rapture of disappointment, ‘Oh! why, *with that head*, is he not a benefactor to his species! Oh! why, *with that head*, is he not a father to the orphan and a friend to the friendless!’ *With that head*, however, he remained old Christopher Casby, proclaimed by common report rich in

¹⁸ According to Rosenberg, Dickensian characterization relies “on the presentation and repetition of a few dominant traits or habits to convey the essence of a character” (ROSENBERG, B. “*Resurrection and Little Dorrit: Tolstoy and Dickens Reconsidered.*” *Studies in the Novel*. 17 (Spring 1985):33).

house property; and *with that head*, he now sat in his silent parlour. Indeed it would be the height of unreason to expect him to be sitting there *without that head*. (p.146, my italics)

The patriarchal head, then, hides an extremely selfish mind in which the real worth of people's lives is measured by the amount of money they can provide him with. Here we have one of the most expressive examples of misleading appearances in characters, those who hide themselves behind the image created by their surface. The Patriarch is one of those characters whose physical features—"his blooming face, and that head, and his blue eyes" (p.147)—serve as a contrast to their real self, for these features deliver "wisdom, virtue and benignity" (p.147).

Oddly enough, this character is covered with the deepest hue of green, for "he had a long wide-skirted bottlegreen coat on, and a bottle-green pair of trousers, and a bottle-green waistcoat" (p.147-148). This is a colour which stands for stagnation, a meaning that explains the immutable image which is presented of Mr. Casby. Such lack of development and what goes on in "that head" is what we will see in relation to his actions. Once again, Dickens not only plays with colours but with names, for the Patriarch is anything else but patriarchal to his tenants in Bleeding Heart Yard.

Flora, Mr. Casby's daughter, was Arthur's old sweetheart and, now, a widower who "had grown to be very broad too, and short of breath; [...who] had become a peony; [...who] had seemed enchanting in all she said and thought, was diffuse and silly [...who] had been spoiled and artless long ago, was determined to be spoiled and artless now" (p.150). In order to complete the sense of unexpectedness and perplexity caused by Flora's appearance, her behaviour as a "chatterer" is strongly emphasized, a characteristic that makes her one of the most hilarious creations in the story. This will be further explored in 1.6.

Another character belonging to the Patriarch's household is *Pancks*, Mr. Casby's rent collector at Bleeding Heart Yard and one of the curious characters in the novel.¹⁹ Pancks is

a *quick* and *eager* short dark man [...] dressed in black and rusty iron grey; had jet black beads of eyes; a scrubby little black chin; wiry black hair striking out from his head in prongs, like forks or hair-pins; and a complexion that was very dingy by nature, or very dirty by art, or a compound of nature and art. He had dirty hands and dirty broken nails, and looked as if he had been in the coals; he was in a perspiration, and *snorted* and *sniffed* and *puffed* and *blew*, like a little labouring steam-engine. (p.148, my italics)

This is Pancks, the “little steam-engine,”²⁰ whose eagerness and quickness invades almost all the spheres of the story. Pancks's description not only expresses the idea of movement which he embodies, but makes us wonder why the narrator chose to portray him as a “compound of nature and art”. Pancks is one of those fairy-like figures (despite his “dirty” complexion and clothes) whose appearance and behaviour feature very unusual and enigmatic elements. The term “enigmatic” seems to suit him best, for Pancks embodies the very essence of mystery. Pancks is also called “the fortune-teller, the gypsy” (p.289), which only adds to the mystery of his “tug-like” character. Again Dickens chooses an image to filter the character through—this grey coloured, dirty “steam-engine,” portrayed as if aroused from the depths of a coal mine, this “compound of nature and art,” can be said to be one of those minor characters who is enhanced through his incisive action, for he “tugs” not only Mr. Casby around but also the inner workings of the story.

¹⁹ Ireland states that Dickens “[provides] numerous characters whose outward appearance is odd and whose actions are eccentric, sharply marking them off from everyday orthodoxy” (IRELAND, K.R. “Urban Perspectives: Fantasy and Reality in Hoffman and Dickens.” CL 30 (Spring 1978):141).

²⁰ This indicates the use of the *human-as-object*, that is, when “human actions are [...] expressed in terms of objects, and the type of relationship determines the effect produced” (*Ibid.*, p.146, my italics).

Apart from Pancks, there was also another, a most *original figure* in the Patriarchal tent:

This was an amazing little old woman, with a face like a staring *wooden doll* too cheap for expression, and a stiff yellow wig perched unevenly on the top of her head, as if the child who owned the doll had driven a tack through it anywhere, so that it only got fastened on. Another *remarkable thing* in this little old woman was, that the same child seemed to have damaged her face in two or three places with some blunt instrument in the nature of a spoon; her countenance, and particularly the tip of her nose, presenting the phenomena of several dints, generally answering to the bowl of that article. A further *remarkable thing* in this little old woman was, that she had no name but Mr. F's Aunt. (p.157)

Mr. F's Aunt was the “legacy” (p.157) left to Flora by her deceased husband, Mr. Finching. The description of this nameless odd character, her woden and doll-like appearance, her damaged countenance, apart from all the “remarkable things” she is presented with, makes us wonder at the importance of such an absurd being within the story. However, if closely observed, Mr. F's Aunt is one of those minor characters who, despite an amorphous and hideous appearance, performs a role through which others (especially Arthur) are induced to rethink their own attitude. This will be further analysed in 1.6.

Another frame of minor characters is that established by the Barnacles—Barnacle Junior and Mr. Tite Barnacle—those linked to the world of the Circumlocution Office, a place where the family of “Barnacles” cling steadily and irrevocably, something clearly expressed through their name. They represent some of the amazing examples of Dickens's satire in characterization, for the Barnacles are characters who carry a good deal of Dickens's criticism of the government of his time.²¹ This is a fact that makes them relevant to the frames formed by minor characters, for they represent people who are abhorred

²¹ According to Ireland, “the device of treating human beings as animals is most tellingly used by Dickens to dramatize social criticism” (IRELAND, p.148).

for their leech-like characteristics and who are part of an important portion of the government mechanism, as they represent “barriers” which control and detain the forward movement of society:

The Barnacles were a very high family, and a very large family. They were dispersed all over the public offices, and held all sorts of public places. Either the nation was under a load of obligation to the Barnacles, or the Barnacles were under a load of obligation to the nation. It was not quite unanimously settled which; the Barnacles having their opinion, the nation theirs. (p.107)

One of the main inhabitants of this shoal of Barnacles was *Barnacle Junior*, who “had a youthful aspect, and the fluffiest little whisker, perhaps, that ever was seen. [...] He had a superior eye-glass dangling round his neck, but unfortunately had such flat orbits to his eyes, and such limp eyelids, that it wouldn’t stick in when he put it up, but kept tumbling out against his waistcoat buttons with a click that discomposed him very much” (p.108). Barnacle Junior is that type of civil servant who does not “serve” at all. He represents the young portion of a group of people whose sole intent is to cling to norms and to a bureaucratic way of dealing with society. This is expressed in the way he is referred to, “a young bird” whose life is to try to keep his eye-glass in its right place and to keep “the public” out of the way of the Circumlocution Office.

Towering above the expressionless Barnacle Junior we find his father, *Mr. Tite Barnacle*, a man who

wound and wound folds of white cravat round his neck, as he *wound and wound* folds of tape and paper round the neck of the country. His wristbands and collar were *oppressive*, his voice and manner were *oppressive*. He had a large watchchain and bunch of seals, a coat *buttoned up to inconvenience*, a waistcoat *buttoned up to inconvenience*, an *unwrinkled* pair of trousers, a *stiff* pair of boots. He was altogether *splendid, massive, overpowering, and impracticable*. He seemed to have been sitting for his portrait to Sir Thomas Lawrence all the days of his life. (p.111, my italics)

The remarkable contrast between father and son is overemphasized in this description, for Mr. Tite Barnacle's appearance, with the "wounding" and "oppressive" characteristic of his attire, and his "overpowering" and "impracticable" presence clearly denote his influence in the Circumlocution Office and what he represents to the public life.

Also wound in the red tape of the Circumlocution Office is *Daniel Doyce*, "a smith and engineer" (p.119) who tries to have his invention "of great importance to his country and his fellow-creatures" (p.119) approved by the eminent office, and becomes, later on, Arthur's partner. Doyce was

not much to look at, either in point of size or in point of dress; being merely a short, square, *practical looking man*, whose hair had turned grey, and in whose face and forehead there were *deep lines of cogitation*, which looked as though they were carved in hardwood. He was dressed in decent black, a little rusty, and had the appearance of *a sagacious master in some handicraft*. He had a spectacle-case in his hand, [...] *a hand accustomed to tools* [...] He was a *quiet, plain, steady man*. (p.118, my italics)

This is the picture of an uncommitted man whose mind is always toiling in a skilful creation. Moreover, "the ingenious culprit was a man of great modesty and good sense; and, though a plain man, had been too much accustomed to combine what was original and daring in conception with what was patient and minute in execution, to be by any means an ordinary man" (p.188). Daniel Doyce, this "ordinary man," stands for all those "ingenuous" characters whose misfortune is due to the "circumlocution" caused by bureaucratic offices. One of the criticisms²² of his character is that the nature of his invention is never revealed. But Dickens seems to do it on purpose for, unspecified, it can stand for any liberating or free idea which stumbles across bureaucratic offices, for the way artists are not valued, or for the prejudice they suffer because of the nature of their art. Doyce and his invention, in sum, stand

²² YEAZELL, R.B. "Do It or Dorrit." *Novel*. 25 (Fall 1991):35.

for all creative force that finds its way made difficult by those whose interest is “not to do it,” not develop it on behalf of an individual of unlimited creativity. Doyce represents one of Dickens’s leading criticisms in the novel—he fights against the narrow-mindedness which stops the individual from developing himself and his country.

Still another frame of characters linked to the ideas cherished by those belonging to the Circumlocution Office is formed by *the Merdles*—Mrs Merdle, Mr. Sparkler and Mr. Merdle—people who are described according to their relationship with “Society”. *Mrs Merdle* was a

lady [...] not young and fresh from the hand of Nature, but was young and fresh from the hand of her maid. She had large *unfeeling* handsome eyes, and dark *unfeeling* handsome hair, and a broad *unfeeling* handsome bosom, and was made the most of in every particular. Either because she had a cold, or because it suited her face, she wore a rich white fillet tied over her head and under her chin. And if ever there were an *unfeeling* handsome chin that looked as if, for certain, it had never been, in unfamiliar parlance, ‘chucked’ by the hand of man, it was the chin curbed up so tight and close by that laced bridle. (p.238, my italics)

Mrs Merdle’s “unfeeling handsome” features are tightly related to her cold, hypocritical personality. This description gives us the extent of her “unsympathetic” nature and how she is related to those within and outside her society. Curiously and amusingly, the narrator reinforces Mrs Merdle’s characterization by introducing a *parrot* as her companion at home, “a character” whose “posture” and “shrieks” reinforce its mistress’s “unfeeling” features and the way she behaves towards “society”.

Sparkler, Mrs Merdle’s only son, was, according to his mother, “two or three-and-twenty [...] a little gay, a thing Society is accustomed to in young men, and [...] very impressible” (p.239). Sparkler was of “a chuckle-headed high-shouldered make, with a general appearance of being, not so much a young

man as a swelled boy. He had given so few signs of reason, that a by-word went among his companions that his brain had been frozen in a mighty frost [...] at a period of his birth [...] and had never thawed from that hour” (p.248). His description makes us realize that he is one of those “weak” minor characters whose presence is necessary in order to emphasize the others’ strength. Sparkler, this “shining” example of a man, had as his sole “attribute” his being Mr. Merdle’s “son-in-law,” and Fanny’s husband-to-be.

Mr. Merdle, Mrs Merdle’s second husband, in his turn was “immensely rich; a man of prodigious enterprise; a Midas without the ears, who turned all he touched to gold” (p.247), whose

desire was to the utmost to satisfy Society (whatever that was), and take up all its drafts upon him for tribute. He did not shine in company; he had not very much to say for himself; he was a reserved man, with a broad, overhanging, watchful head, that particular kind of dull red [and yellow] colour in his cheeks which is rather stale than fresh, and a somewhat uneasy expression about his coat-cuffs, as if they were in his confidence, and had reasons for being anxious to hide his hands. (p.247)

In this description we have all the hints we need in order to establish *the great Merdle*’s role as a “forger” in the story—his “desire to satisfy Society,” his “reserved” character, the “dull” colours which “mask” him, the “staleness” of his appearance and his “expression about his coat-cuffs”. He is one of those characters who seems to be untouchable despite the dubious and hideous traits he carries within and outside himself.

Moreover, the pun on “the magic name of Merdle” (p.564), if literally translated from the French, gives us the right idea of the rascal Dickens wanted us to recognize in him. Apart from that, the mythical and misleading image created around the great Merdle is reinforced by Mrs Merdle, who is deliberately called the *Bosom*, and her son, Mr. Sparkler, whose name soon indicates his superficiality and function in the story.

In the Merdle's household we find *The Chief Butler*, "the Avenging Spirit of [Mr. Merdle's] life" (p.557). This servant is "a hard man [,...] a respectable Nemesis, [with the eyes of a] basilisk" (p. 557). His "office" is marked by his dignity and rank, which indicates the high self-esteem with which he regarded himself.

Among *Mr. Merdle's relations* there is a herd of allegorical characters whose names reveal the characteristics they have. They are "magnates from the Court and magnates from the City, magnates from the Commons and magnates from the Lords, magnates from the bench and magnates from the bar, Bishop magnates, Treasury magnates, Horse Guards magnates, Admiralty magnates,—all the magnates that keep us going, and sometimes trip us up" (p.248): Bishop, Horse Guards, Treasury, Bar (with a persuasive double eye-glass), Brother Bellows, Admiralty, Bench and the Physician. For these characters Dickens uses no description, no names, just labels. These are types that characterize *Society*, another curious character within the novel, a "lady" whose nature, according to Mrs Merdle, was "so difficult to explain to young persons (indeed it [was] difficult to explain to most persons) [,for it was] so arbitrary [...] and exacting" (p.239) while suppressing and dominating those who want to move in it.

After mentioning "suppression and domination" we can consider another frame of minor characters which, in contrast with those above, are much despised by Society, that is, *the inmates* of the Marshalsea prison. These characters, who can only be compared to the *Bleeding Hearts*, although in a different sphere, received a very detailed description, for these are the ones who toil and suffer the misfortunes within the lowest frame of Society without any way of escaping it—unless the author of their creation decided to give them an unexpected fortune, of course. These inmates are considered through Arthur's point of view, showing how they were visited by those who were free to come in and out, like himself:

The shabbiness of these attendants upon shabbiness, the poverty of these insolvent waiters upon insolvency, was a sight to see. Such threadbare coats and trousers, such fusty gowns and shawls, such squashed hats and bonnets, such boots and shoes, such umbrellas and walking-sticks, never were seen in Rag Fair. All of them wore the cast-off clothes of other men and women; were made up of patches and pieces of other people's individuality, and had no sartorial existence of their own proper [...] Mendicity on commission stooped in their high shoulders, shambled in their unsteady legs, buttoned and pinned and darned and dragged their clothes, frayed their button-holes, leaked out of their figures in dirty little ends of tape, and issued from their mouths in alcoholic breathing. (p.91)

This description becomes much more than mere physical description for it touches upon the question of the inmates's "individuality," the fact that their patched clothes would represent their "patched lives," for their existence as whole human beings, as individuals, was left outside the prison gates. Inside, the individual would give way to the group, to the anonymous world in which names are dispensable. The common cause that links them seems to surpass the need for individuality, for integrity.

The *Bleeding Hearts*, who live in their community, are also deprived of their individual sense of being human, of their names. Society only considers the individual when he is placed into a higher sphere of relations, where names, titles and property are what matters. In a lower sphere, the group would be homogeneous enough not to require or deserve individual treatment.

Among these lesser inhabitants is Little Dorrit's inseparable friend, one that reinforces her goodness and her motherly affection, for this friend, *Maggy*, only called her "Little Mother". *Maggy* was

eight-and-twenty, with large bones, large features, large feet and hands, large eyes and no hair. Her [...] eyes were limpid and almost colourless; they seemed to be very little affected by light, and to stand unnaturally still. There was also that attentive listening expression in her face, which is seen in the faces of the blind; but she was not blind, having one tolerably serviceable eye. Her face was not exceedingly ugly, though it was only redeemed from being so by a smile; a good-humoured smile, and pleasant in

itself, but rendered pitiable by being constantly there. A great white cap, [...] apologised for Maggy's baldness, and made it so very difficult for her old black bonnet to retain its place upon her head, that it held on round her neck like a gipsy's baby. A commission of haberdashers could alone have reported what the rest of her poor dress was made of; but it had a strong general resemblance to seaweed, with here and there a gigantic tea-leaf. Her shawl looked particularly like a tea-leaf, after long infusion. (p.100-101)

The “kindness” which characterizes the way Maggy's description is presented to us reveals the relevance given to this seemingly “unimportant” character. The contrasting qualities of her features, “exceedingly” large and ugly, yet, lit by a constant and “pleasant smile,” embody her with a complexity which is hidden by an amorphous babyish appearance. Maggy's “attentive listening” also denotes a disguised sensitivity, for Maggy's personality is marked by a sharp perception of her surroundings.

This large, shabby, affectionate child (for Maggy was, owing to a bad fever, nothing more than ten years of age in her mind) stands as Little Dorrit's counterpart, for her description above shows us the curious and almost sad comparison that can be made between herself and Little Dorrit's diminutive womanly figure. Maggy is that kind of companion that not only seems to be put there to highlight Little Dorrit's qualities, but is also one of those meticulously constructed characters whose role is to reveal inner traits of the group in which she dwells.

Thus, the main points in Dickens's mode of characterization were traced through the presentation of the characters' physical and psychological traits made above, inside their specific frames. In dealing with detailed aspects of the characters' descriptions we hope to have built up the grounds for analysing their action and interaction—as their physical and psychological description would contain the elements intrinsic to the development of their action. In this way, we establish the basis for the frame analysis proposed in this

work, as defined by Goffman, based on the organization of social experience, for the nature of such experience is marked according to the characters' particular characteristics and behaviour.²³

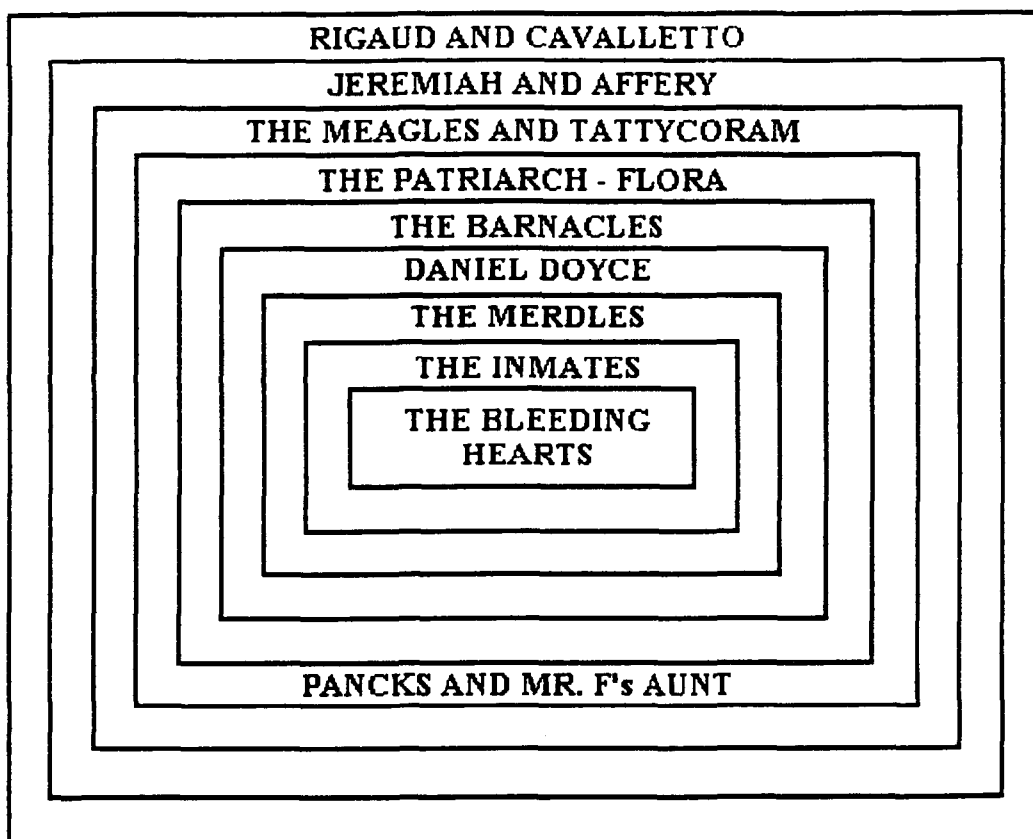
Characterization also provided us with two other “breaks” in terms of analysis: first, there is the dual pattern established by major and minor characters; second, within these frames characters are presented through the device of “appearance and reality” which reinforces their psychological traits and their function in the novel. Therefore, apart from reinforcing the breaks already perceived in terms of structure and plot, characterization also indicates a deeper level of break in terms of the analysis of structural elements.

The frames of minor character are demonstrated in Graphic VIII:

²³ Todorov states that “the construction of character is a compromise between difference and repetition. On the one hand, we must have continuity: the reader must construct the same character. This continuity is already given in the identity of the proper name, which is its principal function. At this point, any and all combinations become possible: all actions might illustrate the same character trait, or the behaviour of a particular character might be contradictory, or he might change with circumstances of his life, or he might undergo profound character modification” (TODOROV, T. “Reading as Construction.” In HOFFMAN, M.J. & MURPHY, P.D. (eds.) *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1988, p.413).

GRAPHIC VIII

MINOR CHARACTERS



Next, we will analyse *point of view*, which will then lead to the characters' type of behaviour and how it influences the way the novel is structured and developed.

1.4. The Omniscient Narrator's Point of View

'You don't regard it from the right point of view. It is the point of view that is the *essential thing*.'

Ferdinand Barnacle¹

As Goffman states, *point of view* is considered an intrinsic part of frame construction, for one of the advantages of the

novelistic frames [is that the author] can choose a "point of view," telling [the characters'] story as someone outside [them] or through the eyes of one of them, sometimes constructing a special character for this purpose. Moreover [he] can change this point of view from one chapter or section to another or even employ multiple points of view in the same strip of action.²

The flexibility with which "novelistic frames" can be dealt with in relation to point of view gives us the basis for presenting a thorough analysis of one aspect of the frame structure of *Little Dorrit*, *point of view*, in order to show that the novel, which is supposed to be entirely written through an omniscient narrative, is, in fact, presented through an interwoven pattern of external and internal narration, for the narrator sometimes adopts an *outside* position in relation to characters or tells the story *through* their own perspective.

In order to develop such an analysis, Boris Uspensky's theory on point of view in the novel, in *A Poetics of Composition*,³ will be employed, as it is also based on frame analysis and deals with point of view as a "compositional device," for "the problem of point of view is directly related to those forms of art which by definition have two planes, a plane of expression and a plane of

¹ DICKENS, p.736, my italics.

² GOFFMAN, p.151-153, my italics.

³ USPENSKY, B. *A Poetics of Composition*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1983.

content (the representation and that which is represented)".⁴ It is also regarded as a "controlling" element in the structuralization of a literary work, for different points of view can be used in a work of art, hence their connection with various levels of the narrative. This theory, then, will enable us to establish the frame structure formed by the external and internal points of view employed in the novel and its relationship with the other structural frames to be analysed in this work.

In relation to Goffman, Uspensky has a complementary approach to point of view, for his theory, apart from regarding it as a structural device, also analyses it through *planes* which illustrate the "kinds of relationship [that] may occur among [points of view], what their functions are, and so forth".⁵ These planes are divided into, first, *ideological*, which indicates

whose point of view [...] the author [assumes] when he evaluates or perceives ideologically the world which he describes. This point of view, either concealed or openly acknowledged, may belong to the author himself; or it may be the normative system of the narrator, as distinctive from that of the author [...]; or it may belong to one of the characters.⁶

Uspensky further stresses, in relation to this plane, that "when we speak of the system of ideas that shape the work, we are speaking about the deep compositional structure, as opposed to the surface compositional structure which may be traced on the psychological, spatio-temporal, or phraseological levels".⁷

Second, we have the *phraseological* plane through which "the author uses different diction to describe different characters or, when he makes use of

⁴ USPENSKY, p.2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.8.

one form or another of repeated or substituted speech in his description”.⁸ Third, we find the *spatial/temporal* plane, which deals with the problem of “perspective,” which refers to “a system for the representation of three- or four-dimensional space by means of artistic devices, specific to the particular art form. The reference point in the system of linear perspective is the position of the person who does the description”.⁹ Finally, we have the *psychological* plane which occurs in “those cases where the authorial point of view relies on an individual consciousness (or perception)”.¹⁰

Through these planes, then, we will be able to identify the spheres to which the concept of point of view can be applied in the literary text.

1.4.1. Ideological Plane

Little Dorrit, as a characteristic Victorian novel, has as its leading narrative voice the omniscient one, which here is divided into *external* and *internal* perspectives. Firstly, this is indicated by the narrator’s *external* point of view, from which the world of the novel is perceived and evaluated. This is observed in the opening description of Marseilles (p.1) where the narrator emphasizes the effect of the powerful staring “sun” on the city and its inhabitants:

Thirty years ago, Marseilles lay *burning* in the sun one day. A *blazing* sun upon a *fierce* August day was no greater rarity in southern France then, than at any other time, before or since. Everything in Marseilles, and about Marseilles, had stared at the *fervid* sky, and been stared at in return, until a staring habit had become universal there. Strangers were stared out of countenance by staring white houses, staring white walls, staring white streets, staring tracts of *arid* road, staring hills from which verdure was *burnt away*. [...] There was no wind to make a ripple on the *foul* water within the harbour, or on the *beautiful* sea without. The

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 81.

line of demarcation between the colours, black and blue, showed the point which the *pure* sea would not pass; but it lay as quiet as the *abominable* pool, with which it never mixed. (p.1, my italics)

The contrasting choice of qualifiers and the emphasis given to the “fiery” effect of the “staring” sun clearly shows the narrator’s “negative,” critical attitude towards the place and its inhabitants. Even the choice of the verb “to stare”—which indicates a long, deep look—reinforces the “threatening” effect this “look” has upon Marseilles. In this introductory paragraph, the “universal stare” upon the city can be said to represent the narrator’s own scrutinizing “stare” upon the whole world of the novel and how he will evaluate it from his *external* viewpoint.¹¹

Secondly, the ideological point of view is shown through the narrator’s account of some of the characters’ consciousness, that is, Arthur’s and Little Dorrit’s *internal* points of view. The choice of these two characters is based on the fact that, in narratives in which different points of view are employed, the number of characters with whom the narrator “shares” his perspective is functionally limited.

According to Uspensky,

the author assumes the form of some of the characters, embodying himself in them for the period of time. We might compare the author to an actor who plays different roles, transfiguring himself alternatively into several characters. In this way, the internal descriptions of the state of mind of these characters are logically justified.¹²

¹¹ According to Jaffe, “Dickens’ omniscience may operate invisibly, but it is anything but secret. The omniscient Dickensian narrator frequently calls attention to his superior vision, mobility, and knowledge; [...] Like the panoptic tower itself, Dickensian omniscience is paradoxically both public and private affair, its secrecy well advertised. [...] Dickens’ narrator often seems to want both readers and characters to recognize the limitations of their knowledge” (JAFFE, A. “‘Never be Safe but in Hiding’: Omniscience and Curiosity in *The Old Curiosity Shop*.” *Novel* 19 (Winter 1986):121).

¹² USPENSKY, p.91.

This type of “identification,” between author-characters, usually happens in relation to the main ones. In this case, Arthur and Little Dorrit become the *subject* of the author’s perception while the minor ones are the *object*, for they are only perceived from the outside.

The function of the transition of the narrator’s *external* perspective to Arthur’s and Little Dorrit’s *internal* one, this shift in perspective, is to force the reader to a closer inspection of the text, for each time a different perspective is employed he has to reconsider what is going on in terms of plot and character.¹³ In the case of Arthur, the first scene in which the narrator lets us regard his perceptions and thoughts is when he is placed by “the window,” and sees the dreary city outside it:

Mr. Arthur Clennam, [...] sat in the window of a coffee-house on Ludgate Hill. Ten thousand responsible houses surrounded him, frowning as heavily on the streets they composed, [...] Fifty thousand lairs surrounded him [while he sat] counting one of the neighbouring bells, making sentences and burdens of songs out of it in spite of himself, and wondering how many sick people it might be the death of in the course of the year. (p.28-29)

In this scene, we have the interchange of external and internal realities, for the gloomy and repressive characteristic of the outside world reflects Arthur’s feelings and introduces us to the character’s past and present life. Thus, the representation of Arthur’s state of mind is preceded by an exposition carried from the external point of view which reinforces this transition in perspective.

Another instance of how Arthur’s *subjectivity* is explored occurs in his soliloquy-like speech¹⁴ to himself:

¹³ This is an instance of the technique of *mixing narrative points of view*, in which ‘vacillating’ narration [becomes] a potentially ‘competitive’ game [between author-reader]” (HUTCHINSON, p.35).

¹⁴ See Uspensky’s comments on ‘narrated monologue’ (USPENSKY, p.42-43).

‘From the unhappy suppression of my youngest days, through the rigid and unloving home that followed them, through my departure, my long exile, my return, my mother’s welcome, my intercourse with her since, down to the afternoon of this day with poor Flora,’ said Arthur Clennam [to himself], ‘what have I found!’ (p.165)¹⁵

Arthur becomes the vehicle of his own thoughts and allows the reader to come nearer to his emotion and consciousness. The ideas conveyed through “suppression,” lack of love, “departure-exile-return,” and the relationship with his mother give us a gloomy picture of his state of mind and prepare us to understand the development the character will probably undergo in the story.

In the same way that the narrator deals with Arthur’s perceptions, he also calls the reader’s attention to another internal perspective, for he points out that “this history must sometimes see with Little Dorrit’s eyes” (p.167). As Little Dorrit comments on the possibility of her father’s leaving prison, that is, “I have often thought that if such a change could come, it might be anything but a service to him now. People might not think so well of him outside as they do there. He might not be so fit himself for the life outside, as he is for that” (p.98-99). Such comments draw the reader closer to Little Dorrit’s concerns regarding her father and show the emphasis given to her own system of evaluation within the novel.

These are instances in which the character is “allowed” to express his/her own ideas without the direct influence of the narrator’s voice. In an omniscient narrative, this transition in perspective works as a distancing device in the narrator-character relationship which helps the reader to come closer to the character’s consciousness and to apprehend it better.

¹⁵ This type of narrative is also related to the ‘phraseological plane’ for here occurs an instance in which “the author’s voice to some degree [imitates] someone else’s voice. [...] the author’s reworking of someone else’s speech is evident in cases when the feelings and thoughts of a character are made known to us in a form which seems to imitate the manner of that character, while references to this character are in the third person” (*Ibid.*, p.41).

Another characteristic of Arthur and Little Dorrit in this respect is that they are endowed with an “observant” quality. This means that, apart from the narrator’s own *objective* and observing eye, we are presented with these two characters’ *subjective* impressions of their surroundings and companions. In this sense, they work as “filters,”¹⁶ for their consciousness “captures” what the narrator considers as the best “choices” for enhancing the narrative. This “filtering” function can be observed on the occasion Arthur talks to Pancks about the mysterious Miss Wade, for “Arthur, hurriedly *reviewing his own observation* of her, found it to tally pretty nearly with Mr. Panck’s view” (p.541, my italics); or, when Little Dorrit expresses apprehension towards Blandois, for “the appearance of this traveller was particularly disagreeable to her” (p.444), which is reinforced by the fact that “[she] had sometimes *thought*, and now thought again [...] that he had made his way too easily into her father’s house” (p.511, my italics). Thus, Arthur’s and Little Dorrit’s consciousness is put in the foreground. A shift in perspective occurs within the narrator’s voice, which indicates two different realities merging together.

By presenting this double shift in perspective the author establishes the parameters for the dual characteristic in the literal frame structure of the novel, for Arthur’s and Little Dorrit’s *subjective* perspectives (internal), through the description of thoughts and feelings, become, along with the narrator’s *objective* one (external), the main guide-lines for establishing two different levels of perception within the novel.

1.4.2. Phraseological Plane

Linked to the “ideological plane” each character presents a unique type of speech which leads us to the “phraseological plane” of point of view.

¹⁶ CHATMAN, S. *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, p.144.

In the phaseological plane we find *variation in speech* which is detected when a “change in the authorial point of view becomes evident with the intrusion within the authorial text of elements of someone else’s speech—that is, elements of speech characteristic of one or another character”.¹⁷ The variation in speech is marked by the employment of foreign words, mannerism, nonsense, naming, italics, quasi-direct discourse and substituted direct discourse.

The author deliberately adopts an external point of view and reproduces foreign or irregular speech naturally, while emphasizing external features which would go unnoticed during the characters’ interaction. One of the functions of such variation is to convey the style pertaining to the person described. When it occurs, the narrator becomes an “editor,”¹⁸ for he hears what the characters are saying to one another and records everything with extreme precision. Attention is directed to the phonetic peculiarities of the characters and modes of speaking which are reworked and transposed to their direct speech. Some significant examples of this are found in the speech of Cavalletto, Mrs Plornish, Mr. Dorrit, Flora, Maggy and Lagnier.

The variation in speech in Cavalletto’s case is marked by Italian words, such as “Altro,” “the word being, according to its Genoese emphasis, a confirmation, a contradiction, an assertion, a denial, a taunt, a compliment, a joke, and fifty other things, became in the present instance, with a significance beyond all power of written expression, our familiar English ‘I believe you!’” (p.8) The foreign language here is used as a “technical device of representation [...and, in such a use] the author stresses the distance between the speaking character and the describing observer”.¹⁹ Moreover, the emphasis given to the cluster of meanings conveyed by the word “altro,” if compared to that of the

¹⁷ USPENSKY, p.32.

¹⁸ HUTCHINSON, p.46.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.50-51.

English expression, gives us the extent to which language has to be adapted in order to achieve communication.

Furthermore, Cavalletto's speech features the words "rincontrato" and "padrona" which reinforce his role as an outsider and "frame" the boundary existent between him and the foreign world in which he has to live—Bleeding Heart Yard. Therefore, Cavalletto's "foreign" speech is particularly observed in relation to the Bleeding Hearts, especially Mrs Plornish. The narrator points out the way Cavalletto's different language was handled, for they would laugh

immoderately at his lively gestures and his childish English [...] They spoke to him in very loud voices as if he were stone deaf. They constructed sentences, by way of teaching him the language in its purity, such as were addressed by the savages to Captain Cook, or by Friday to Robinson Crusoe. Mrs Plornish was particularly ingenious in this art; and attained so much celebrity for saying 'Me ope you leg well soon,' that it was considered in the Yard, but a very short remove indeed from speaking Italian. Even Mrs Plornish began to think that she had a natural call towards that language. As [Cavalletto] became more popular, household objects were brought into requisition for his instruction in a copious vocabulary; and whenever he appeared in the Yard ladies would fly out at their doors crying 'Mr. Baptist—tea-pot!' 'Mr. Baptist—dust-pan!' 'Mr. Baptist—flour-dredger!' 'Mr. Baptist—coffee-biggin!' At the same time exhibiting those articles, and penetrating him with a sense of the appalling difficulties of the Anglo-Saxon tongue. (p.303-304)

The commotion caused by Cavalletto's foreign accent in the Yard shows how such variation in speech can cause a shift in perspective in those directly involved with and affected by it. The response given by the Bleeding Hearts establishes various layers of understanding within the perspective represented by Cavalletto's accent. Such layers are characterized by the immediate responses which normally occur between people speaking different languages, as the Bleeding Hearts would try to diminish the gap between English and Italian by modifying or emphasizing certain words. The

“strangeness”²⁰ caused by Cavalletto’s irregular speech—the dissociation established between the speaking character and the describing observer—which functions as more than a distancing device in the narrative, allows the character to fully express himself, for he becomes the only channel in the outside world of his idiosyncratic characteristics.

A different type of variation in speech—one based on mannerism—is presented in the case of Mr. Dorrit, for the “ha!,” “hum” or “hem” permeating it represents a sign which covers traits of a feeble personality. When telling Arthur about the “testimonials” he used to receive from “guests” or inmates, Mr Dorrit “sounds” like this:

‘But this was—hem—not all. [...] I would remove the paper in half an hour. I—ha—I did so; and I found that it contained—ahem—two guineas. I assure you Mr. Clennam, I have received—hem—Testimonials in many ways, and of many degrees of value, and they have always been—ha—unfortunately acceptable; but I never was more pleased than with this—ahem—this particular Testimonial.’ (p.84)

Such speech not only shows Mr. Dorrit’s “tactful” strategy for inducing Arthur to leave him some money but also the awkwardness of the situation; besides, Mr. Dorrit’s weakness is straightforwardly demonstrated through his hesitant speech.

Still in relation to Mr. Dorrit’s speech we have the narrator’s own comments on and use of it when he indirectly narrates a conversation between Mr. Dorrit and Little Dorrit about her new position in society:

But he had spoken to her alone, and had said that people—ha—people in an exalted position, my dear, must scrupulously exact respect from their dependants; and that for her, his daughter, Miss Amy Dorrit, of the sole remaining branch of the Dorrits of Dorsetshire, to be known—hum—to occupy herself in fulfilling the functions of—ha hum—a valet, would be incompatible with that respect. Therefore, my dear, he—ha—he laid his parental

²⁰ USPENSKY, p.51.

injunctions upon her, to remember that she was a lady, who had now to conduct herself with—hum—a proper pride, and to preserve the rank of a lady; and consequently he requested her to abstain from doing what would occasion—ha—unpleasant and derogatory remarks. (p.463)

This is one of the ironic moments in the narrative when the narrator employs Mr. Dorrit's "type of speech," which conveys mockery and criticism, at the same time. The shift in perspective allows the narrator to express the absurd nature of such conversation and the pretence Mr. Dorrit still carries in his demeanour. By borrowing Mr. Dorrit's "parental injunctions" the narrator opens up a new layer of perception in relation to the reader, for he is forced to relate the narrator's own voice with that of the character and to "judge" the implications of the narrator's attitude to the text.²¹

The variation in speech found in Flora's speech is characterized by the *nonsense*—"the presentation of ideas in a form which runs counter to one's conception of the norm".²² In this case, language may be used for creating humour, questioning or criticism. It may also function enigmatically, for the reader might wonder if there *is* a deeper meaning to these apparently senseless arrangements. Flora, someone who would talk "herself out of breath" (p.153), whenever she was supposed to communicate, has a speech which resembles a stream-of-consciousness "rapidity". She would run on "with astonishing speed, and [point] her conversation with nothing but commas, and very few of them" (p.152). The function of the *nonsense*, in Flora's case, is not just to entertain, to amuse, but to be analysed and understood. In her first meeting with Arthur, she says to him:

²¹ This is an example of "the nonconcurrence of the ideological and the phraseological planes [, that is,] when the narration in a work is conducted from the phraseological point of view of a particular character, while the compositional aim of this work is to evaluate the character from some other point of view. Thus, on the level of phraseology a particular character emerges as the vehicle of the authorial point of view, while on the level of ideology he serves as its object" (USPENSKY, p.103).

²² HUTCHINSON, p.84.

'You mustn't think of going yet,' said Flora [...] you could never be so unkind as to think of going, Arthur—I mean Mr. Arthur—or I suppose Mr. Clennam would be far more proper—but I am sure I don't know what I'm saying—without a word about the dear old days gone for ever, however when I come to think of it I dare say it would be much better not to speak of them and it's highly probable that you have some much more agreeable engagement and pray let Me be the last person in the world to interfere with it though there *was* a time, but I am running into *nonsense* again.' (p.151, my italics)

Even Flora employs the word “nonsense” in order to characterize what she says and the way she says it. The “rambling” way in which Flora’s words are presented reveals both an anxious personality and a being whose tragi-comic performance, paradoxically marked by contradiction and sensitiveness, shows the absurdity in which the human nature can be trapped. One of the ways of showing such absurdity is through Arthur’s discomfort in relation to Flora’s “disjointed” expression.

Variation in speech as point of view is also found in Maggy’s speech, for her “babyish” talk also expresses a tragi-comic behaviour which denotes the scars left by the ill-treatment she received in the past. This is shown when Little Dorrit tells Arthur about the illness which took Maggy into hospital when she was ten years old. In one of her interruptions we have: “Such beds there is there!’ cried Maggy. ‘Such lemonades! Such oranges! Such d’licious broth and wine! Such Chicking! Oh, AIN’T it a delightful place to go and stop at!’” (p.102) The nature of Maggy’s speech can be compared to that of Flora’s, for both represent a noncoherent way of expression which is a consequence of someone else’s evildoing in the past. The narrator, then, inserts such “variations” in the text in order to reinforce the representability of such characters.

Within the phraseological plane there is, still, the matter of *naming*, for the “analysis [...of] the problem of naming may allow us to specify some

compositional patterns pertaining to the organization of the work as a whole”.²³ This is achieved through the speech of the characters and that of the narrator, for along with the changes in naming, there occurs a change in perspective which establishes different layers within the narrative. One of the most significant examples of this shift in naming, in *Little Dorrit*, is related to the “villain” who is called Rigaud (Book I, Chapter I), alias Lagnier (Book I, Chapter XI), alias Blandois (from Book I, Chapter XXX, until the end), a device which indicates Rigaud’s several facets and the playful behaviour adopted towards his “victims”. In his case, “naming” plays a different “trick,” for Rigaud is the only one, apart from Cavalletto, to know about such changes. Therefore, the change in perspective is practised by himself, as all those names indicate the way he regarded himself and the role he was to play at certain times. No wonder Blandois says to Mr. Dorrit “that almost all objects had their various points of view” (p.441): one of these “objects” was himself. Apart from Rigaud, our heroine also suffers the effects of “naming,” for she is referred to as “The Child of the Marshalsea” by the prison inmates, as Amy by her family, as Dorrit by the narrator, as Little Mother by Maggy, and as Little Dorrit by Arthur. The question of Arthur’s naming Little Dorrit is raised when he calls her “my child” (p.167) and Little Dorrit becomes distressed by it. This particular “mistake” gains a different connotation here, because she preferred Arthur to call her Little Dorrit “than any [other] name” (p.167), and the psychological effect that “my child” has upon her is very strong. In the latter case, Arthur’s attitude towards her (at least at the beginning of the story) is clearly expressed. The variation in her names represents the ways she is perceived throughout the novel and reflects the active role she has, for each group of characters sees her in a different function—the mother, the child and the woman—each, at the same time, conflicting with and completing the other.

²³ USPENSKY, p.27.

Arthur also undergoes some variation in terms of naming for, apart from the perspective established by those closely related to him such as Mrs Clennam, Jeremiah and Affery, who call him “Arthur,” he experiences Flora’s different ways of addressing him. Her “rambling” way finds it difficult to place a proper name for him and this is emphasized whenever they meet. Such difficulty can be linked to Flora’s fluctuating between past and present, thus her awkwardness while dealing with Arthur. The way Flora tries to address Arthur is the following:

‘Dear Arthur—force of habit, Mr. Clennam every way more delicate and adapted to existing circumstances.’

[...Or:] ‘Arthur, Mr. Clennam far more proper, even Doyce and Clennam probably more business-like.’

[...Or still:] ‘Arthur—cannot remember Mr. Clennam until the word is out, such is the habit of times for ever fled.’ (p.268-269)

Each time Flora addresses him she demonstrates a different perspective. Such a shift is confirmed by her behaviour towards Arthur and the ways she perceives him.

On the phraseological plane, we also find the use of *italics* which, in Dickens’ case, seem to be used as a “reinforcement” of a character’s own point of view. When Pancks talks about the Bleeding Hearts with Arthur, the words he emphasizes show his “internal” view of the matter in question. He says:

‘*You* can’t say, you know,’ snorted Pancks, taking one of his dirty hands out of his rusty iron-grey pockets to bite his nails, if he could find any, and turning his beads of eyes upon his employer, ‘whether they’re poor or not. They say they are, but they all say that. When a man says he’s rich, you’re generally sure he isn’t. Besides, if they *are* poor, you can’t help it. You’d be poor yourself if you didn’t get your rents.’ (p.156)

The way Pancks stresses the words “you” and “are” indicates how he wants to convince Arthur of his experience in dealing with the Bleeding Hearts. In this sense, Arthur’s own knowledge is questioned, for Pancks emphasis endows him with a higher degree of understanding of the Bleeding Hearts’s world.

The same occurs in a conversation between Amy and Fanny, when Amy says: “At least you may be mistaken, Fanny. Now may you not?” [Fanny answers:] ‘O yes, I *may* be’” (p.505), which shows how Fanny “borrows” Amy’s own perspective in her reply. This indicates how characters are influenced by each other’s evaluative system and how it affects the emphasis they give to the discourse they employ in order to “persuade” the other of his/her ideas.

Another variation within the phraseological plane is marked by the use of *quasi-direct discourse*, the synthesis of both direct and indirect discourse—the combination of “speeches belonging to two different authors: to the speaker himself, and to the person about whom he speaks. In other words, we can observe in the author’s speech a shifting of point of view”.²⁴ This occurs when Mrs Plornish (Sally) is urged by her husband to reproduce one of her dialogues with Little Dorrit:

‘Miss Dorrit,’ said Sally, hushing the baby from side to side, and laying her chin upon the little hand as it tried to disarrange the gown again, ‘came here one afternoon with a bit of writing, telling that how she wished for needlework, and asked if it would be considered any ill-convenience in case she was to give her address here.’ (Plornish repeated, her address here, in a low voice, as if he were making responses at church.) ‘Me and Plornish says, No, Miss Dorrit, no ill-convenience,’ (Plornish repeated, no ill-convenience,) ‘and she wrote it in, according. Which then me and Plornish says, Ho Miss Dorrit!’ (Plornish repeated, Ho Miss Dorrit.) ‘Have you thought of copying it three or four times, as the way to make it known in more places than one? No, says Miss Dorrit, I have not, but I will. She copied it

²⁴ USPENSKY, p.35.

out according, on this table, in a sweet writing, and Plornish, he took it where he worked, having a job just then,' (Plornish repeated, job just then,). (p.140)

The peculiarity of this speech not only lies in Sally's words, but in the reproduction of Mr. Plornish's "asides" which mark another layer within the speech. The narrator's comments on it establish his "influence" on the character's point of view. Another aspect to be emphasized here is the use of the "present tense" which is used to "take the listener directly into the action of the narrative, and to put him into the same position as that occupied by the characters in the story".²⁵ This change in the verb tense reflects a shift in the "temporal plane;" therefore we have here an overlapping of shifts in point of view, one in the phraseological plane and the other in the temporal one. The characteristics of the temporal plane are discussed below.

This "influence" can also be detected in the direct discourse of a character, which is called *substituted direct discourse*;²⁶ that is, the author's reworking of someone else's speech may occur not only within the context of authorial speech but also when the character's speech is in the form of direct discourse. Such influence is found in one of Lagnier's speeches:

'I am a man,' said Monsieur Lagnier, 'whom society has deeply wronged since you last saw me. You know that I am sensitive and brave, and that it is my character to govern. How has society respected those qualities in me? I have been shrieked at through the streets. I have been guarded through the streets against men, and especially women, running at me armed with any weapons they could lay their hands on. I have lain in prison for security, with the place of my confinement kept a secret, lest I should be torn out of it and felled by a hundred blows. I have been carted out of Marseilles in the dead of night, and carried leagues away from it packed in straw. It has not been safe for me to go near my house; and, with a beggar's pittance in my pocket, I have walked through vile mud and weather ever since, until my feet are crippled—look at them! Such are the humiliations that society has

²⁵ USPENSKY, p.71.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.44.

inflicted upon me, possessing the qualities I have mentioned, and which you know me to possess. But society shall pay for it.' (p.132)

One way of interpreting how the author's voice interferes in this particular speech is by considering its implicit criticism of "society". Here the author is far from agreeing with Lagnier's attitude, but is using the villain's words to express a bitter disapproval of society's responsibility for creating such types as Lagnier. The self-assertive tone of Lagnier's speech, the harsh criticism of Society, reflects denunciation: the creation turns against its creator. Dickens endows the character's speech with personality and intensity in order to show his own criticism. This is another example of the nonconcurrence of the ideological and the phraseological planes, for

the author associates himself with [Blandois'] phraseology, but not with his ideology: he speaks in [Blandois'] voice (using his phraseology in authorial speech) but from his own authorial position. In terms of the plane of ideology, [Blandois] functions not as the vehicle of the author's point of view, but, on the contrary, as the object of the author's evaluation. Thus, in terms of phraseology, the author incorporates himself with his character, while in terms of evaluation he "estranges" himself from the character.²⁷

The variations within the phraseological plane show how characters are vulnerable to the narrator's borrowing their perspective and reinforce how he breaks his own narrative voice in order to open up various frames of perception in the story. This is a means to give autonomy to characters' performance and to the literary text itself. In this sense, the narrator's controlling voice becomes disguised and characters and text come closer to the reader's scrutiny.

²⁷ USPENSKY, p.103.

1.4.3. Spatial/Temporal Planes

Apart from the “planes” analysed above, *point of view* has to be regarded in relation to other intrinsic levels of the narrative—the *spatial/temporal planes*, which provide the literary work with a “degree of concreteness,”²⁸ a characteristic which is intrinsically related to the structural organization of the text.

On these planes, point of view is analysed according to the narrator’s spatial/temporal position in relation to his characters and how the adopted perspective frames the narrative text, for according to Uspensky,

the phenomenon of framing [...] may be observed on different levels of an artistic work [...] In terms of *space*, a point of view with a broad horizon [like a ‘bird’s eye view’] which indicates an observer outside the action, is characteristically used in framing a narrative. *Temporal framing* may be realized by the use at the beginning of a narrative of the *retrospective* point of view and subsequently, as the narrative proceeds, of the *synchronic* point of view. In fact, the narrative often begins with hints about the dénouement of the plot which has not yet begun; this indicates the use of a point of view external to the story, a point of view located in the future within the narrative.²⁹

The Spatial Plane

In the first place, the spatial plane in *Little Dorrit* can be detected according to the concurrence or not of the narrator’s position with that of a character.

The *concurrence* of the spatial position of the narrator and that of a character occurs in different forms: *first*, one morning, after spending the night at the Marshalsea, Arthur observes the early movements of the inmates in the

²⁸ USPENSKY, p.76.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.149, my italics.

outer court-yard.” Here, the narrator is “attached”³⁰ to him, for he just gives a detailed description of the place while the character stays in it:

Heartily glad to see the morning, though little rested by the night, [Arthur...] paced the yard for two heavy hours before the gate was open. [After the lodge-gate was open, he] found himself again in the little outer court-yard [where] there was a string of people already straggling in, whom it was not difficult to identify as the nondescript messengers, go-betweens, and errands-bearers of the place. Some of them had been lounging in the rain until the gate should open; others [...] were coming up now, and passing in with damp whitey-brown paper bags from the grocers, loaves of bread, lumps of butter, eggs, milk, and the like. [...] As these people passed him standing still in the court-yard, and one of them turned back to inquire if he could assist him with his services, it came into Arthur Clennam’s mind that he would speak to Dorrit again before he went away. (p.90-91)

The narrator uses this description in order to provide us with a detailed account of part of the routine at the prison and to place Arthur within a world completely unknown to him, for this is the first time he visits the Marshalsea and stays unwillingly locked in there. In this way, Arthur comes closer to Little Dorrit’s world which opens up another layer of perception in relation to her life and herself.

Second, the narrator “[merges] with [Fanny], assuming for the moment, [...her] ideological, phraseological and psychological systems.”³¹ This happens when she scolds Little Dorrit for walking along with Old Nandy, Mrs Plornish’s father, in the street:

‘Yes, miss,’ returned her sister, ‘and you ought to know it [disgraces us]. And you do know it does, and you do it because you know it does. The principal pleasure of your life is to remind your family of their misfortunes. And the next great pleasure of your existence is to keep low company. But, however, if you have no sense of decency, I have. You’ll please to allow me to go on the other side of the way, unmolested.’ (p.368)

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.58.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.58.

The crude, rude tone of Fanny's words shows us how she agrees with her father's worries regarding the family's "position" in the prison. The narrator has to "merge" with the character, for this is a means of portraying his/her psychological traits and moral beliefs. Here, the character speaks for herself without the narrator's evaluative interference. This lack of "influence" embodies Fanny's verbal attack with two opposite characteristics: the strength of her "system of ideas" and her weakness while an individual in society.

Third, the narrator "accompanies" Arthur in his stroll towards Twickenham. He is not embodied in the character, but "portrays" what is going on in the character's inner life. He "accompanies the character but does not merge with him. The position of the author is not then limited to the subjective view of the character but is "suprapersonal,"³² for there is only correspondence on the spatial plane:

[Arthur] went by Fulham and Putney, for the pleasure of strolling over the heath. It was bright and shining there; and when he found himself so far on his road to Twickenham, he found himself a long way on his road to a number of airier and less substantial destinations. They had risen before him fast, in the healthful exercise and the pleasant road. It is not easy to walk alone in the country without musing upon something. And he had plenty of unsettled subjects to meditate upon, though he had been walking to the Land's End. (p.187)

The function of such description seems to give the character a certain "privacy," for his thoughts are not supposed to be scrutinized but inferred by the reader, from a distance. This same distance is imposed on the narrator, for his spatial position only allows him to accompany the character without having the chance to interfere in his "unsettled subjects" of meditation.

Fourth, Rigaud is "accompanied" to the Break of Day but what happens there is not narrated through his point of view. The narrator becomes

³² USPENSKY, p.58.

an “invisible companion [...he] motivates the description of a certain event by following the character; however, he [does] not describe the event from that character’s point of view”:³³

The man turned the handle of the Break of Day door, and limped in. He touched his discoloured slouched hat, as he came in at the door, to a few men who occupied the room. Two were playing dominoes at one of the little tables; three or four were seated round the stove, conversing as they smoked; the billiard-table in the centre was left alone for the time; the landlady of the Daybreak sat behind her little counter among her cloudy bottles of syrups, baskets of cakes, and leaden drainage for glasses, working at her needle. (p.125)

The function of this “invisible companion” here is to avoid the use of the character’s own point of view which delays the reader’s knowledge of his identity. The narrator keeps a certain “mystery” around “the man” who enters the inn, which gives strength to Rigaud’s unexpected “reappearance” in the story.

Fifth, when describing the group of travellers (the Dorrits, the Gowans, Blandois and other people) at the Saint Bernard Convent, the narrator does not rely on any of the characters’ perspective but his own. Here, “the position of the narrator [is] relatively defined: he [is not] attached to one particular character, but to a group of characters. Still, we can pinpoint his spatial location”.³⁴

In this room, [...] the travellers presently drew round the hearth. They were in three parties; of whom the first, as the most numerous and important, was the slowest, and had been overtaken by one of the others on the way up. It consisted of an elderly lady, two grey-haired gentlemen, two young ladies, and their brother. [...] the party that had overtaken them, [...] consisted of only three members: one lady and two gentlemen. The third party [...] were four in number: a plethoric, hungry, and silent German tutor in spectacles, on a tour with three young

³³ USPENSKY, p.58.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.59.

men, his pupils, all plethoric, hungry, and silent, and all in spectacles. These three groups sat round the fire eying each other drily, and waiting for supper. (p.434)

The narrator has to rely on his own perspective, for here he introduces a new situation in the story. This view gives us a detached idea of the separate “groups” of travellers which helps us to observe their behaviour in the new surroundings. The narrator’s emphasis is on the “group,” for his perspective is used to foreshadow future relevant relationships among these characters.

In the second place, the *nonconcurrency*³⁵ of the narrator’s point of view with the position of a character is presented in various forms. In *Little Dorrit* the most relevant perspective, in terms of space, is the “bird’s-eye view”:

an encompassing view of the scene from some single, very general, point of view [...] Frequently, [it] is used at the beginning or the end of a particular scene, or even at the beginning or the end of a whole narrative. [...] The elevated viewpoint, then used at the beginning and end of the narration, serves as a kind of “frame” for the scene, or for the work as a whole.³⁶

In general terms of the novel, the “bird’s eye view” is simultaneously used as an *opening frame*, for the narrator *begins* the story with the description of the “streets” of Marseilles: “everything in Marseilles and about Marseilles, had stared at the fervid sky, and been stared at in return, until the staring habit had become universal there” (p.1), and, he *ends* the story with the description of the streets of London which represents the *closing frame* of the whole work: “[Little Dorrit and Arthur] went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar” (p.826).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.59-60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.63-64.

In specific terms, such a perspective is clearly seen at the beginning of Book I, Chapter I when the narrator first presents a view of Marseilles, then its outskirts, then, foreign countries (p.1-2) and, then, comes back to Marseilles where the prison is introduced together with Rigaud and Cavalletto: “in Marseilles that day there was a villainous prison. In one of its chambers, [...] were two men” (p.2). Up to this point in the chapter, several brackets have been “opened” and “closed” until the representation of the two characters becomes the central, lengthy and most “fragmented” one. The narrator provides us with details about space/time and physical/inner particularities of the two characters:

besides the two men, [there was] a notched and disfigured bench, immovable from the wall [...], there was a broad strong ledge of stone [and] upon it, one of the men lolled. [...] The man who lay on the ledge of the grating [...] jerked his great cloak, [...] the other man was lying on the stone floor, covered with a coarse brown coat. (p.2-14)

After this “lingering” in the narrative the “bird’s eye view” is taken up again in the last paragraph, where it becomes a closing frame for the chapter:

The wide stare stared itself out for one while; the sun went down in a red, green, golden glory; the stars came out in the heavens, and the fire-flies mimicked them in the lower air, as men may feebly imitate the goodness of a better order of beings; the long dusty roads and the interminable plains were in repose—and so deep a hush was on the sea, that it scarcely whispered of the time when it shall give up its dead. (p.14)

The narrator’s account goes from the general to the particular and then to the general again. The function of this account is to give a “global” perspective in terms of space, to allow the reader to “insert” himself in the world to be depicted in the novel and to introduce structural elements which will be further employed.

In this sense, the general or specific view of space provides us with the means to evaluate the scenes together with the narrator. The objectivity of the

elevated view allows us to scrutinize elements that would be missed in a restricted perspective.

Another variation in the narrator's nonconcurring position is *the sequential survey*—"when the narrator's viewpoint moves sequentially from one character to another and from one detail to another, and the reader is given the task of piecing together the separate descriptions into one coherent picture,"³⁷ which can be observed at two important moments in the novel: *first*, when the gathering in the Marshalsea yard, at the moment the Dorrits were leaving, is described. Here, when "sequentially surveying" the crowd at the yard the narrator presents a pantomime description of how they behave and not what they say to each other while waiting for the "procession" which is to come. His remote position only allows him to present a general view of the whole scene. This is also a "silent scene":³⁸

In the yard, were the Collegians and turnkeys. In the yard, were Mr. Pancks and Mr. Rugg, come to see that last touch given to their work. In the yard, was Young John making a new epitaph for himself, on the occasion of his dying of a broken heart. In the yard, was the Patriarchal Casby, looking so tremendously benevolent that many enthusiastic Collegians grasped him fervently by the hand, and the wives and female relatives of many more Collegians kissed his hand, nothing doubting that he had done it all. [...] Through these spectators, the little procession, headed by the two brothers, moved slowly to the gate. (p.427-428)

Second, this viewpoint is used at Mrs Merdle's dinner-party where guests are sequentially surveyed after Mr. Dorrit's unexpected speech. The narrator is "invisibly present"³⁹ here, just glancing at those who are present without assuming anyone's point of view. It is described totally through his own

³⁷ "The movement of the author's point of view here is similar to those camera movements in film that provide a sequential survey of a particular scene" (USPENSKY, p.60).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.65.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.61.

eyes: “by this time, the exceeding mortification undergone by the Bosom had occasioned the withdrawal of the greater part of the company into other rooms. The few who had lingered thus long followed the rest, and Little Dorrit and her father were left to the servants and themselves” (p.648).

In the scenes mentioned above, this type of account, apart from providing their general physical description, functions as a vehicle for the atmosphere created by characters. In the first there is general excitement and, in the second utter mortification, which helps us to infer the characters’ mode of behaviour and talk.

Variation also occurs when “the describing observer moves through the described space [...] in the same way that the movement in films is the result of the projection of a sequence of still frames”.⁴⁰ This is seen when Little Dorrit, “sitting opposite her father in the travelling-carriage” (p.463), “muses” about the places they are going through and what was left behind in England. In this way, the impression of “movement” conveyed by the description of the places the family passes through before reaching Venice is mainly filtered through Little Dorrit’s eyes.

The Temporal Plane

Linked to the *spatial plane* we also have the *temporal plane*, on which point of view, still according to Uspensky, can have some variations, for “the narrator may count time and order the chronological events from the position of one of the characters [borrowing his/her subjective timing of events]; or he may use his own time schema”.⁴¹

In *Little Dorrit*, the question of changes in the narrator’s temporal position is, however, more complex than that theorized by Uspensky: the

⁴⁰ USPENSKY, p.62.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.65-66.

narrator often uses his own authorial time interpolated with the individual time sense mainly borrowed from Arthur, as when he desperately talks to Pancks about the ruin he caused his partner, Daniel Doyce, by investing money in Mr. Merdle's enterprise:

'I,' pursued Clennam, without attending to him, 'who have ruined my partner! Pancks, Pancks, I have ruined Doyce! The honest, self-helpful, indefatigable old man, who has worked his way all through his life; the man who has contended against so much disappointment, and who has brought out of it such a good and hopeful nature; the man I have felt so much for, and meant to be so true and useful to; I have ruined him—brought him to shame and disgrace—ruined him, ruined him!' (p.712)

The narrator may also interpolate his temporal position with Little Dorrit's, as can be observed when she visits Arthur in prison and tries to convince him to accept her help to pay his debt:

'I have no use for money. I have no wish for it. It would be of no value at all to me, but for your sake, I could not be rich, and you here. I must always be much worse than poor, with you distressed. Will you let me lend you all I have? Will you let me give it you? Will you let me show you that I never have forgotten, that I never can forget, your protection of me when this was my home? Dear Mr. Clennam, make me of all the world the happiest, by saying Yes?' (p.759)

This interpolation of the authorial temporal position with the character's perspective functions as a vehicle to give the character autonomy in his sphere of action and to strengthen the character's own view of the situation he is in. The agony perceived in Arthur's outburst and the willingness in Little Dorrit's request are fully apprehended since their views are employed. If the narrator's own perspective were employed here, the temporal distance would interfere and diminish the psychological effect of the narrative.

Owing to these interpolations in the narrator's temporal position, the narrative is characterized by a "double perspective," for it can be carried on from

the viewpoint of more than one character in the action, and, simultaneously, from the narrator's point of view. When the narrator's temporal position is "synchronous" with that of the character—he borrows the character's "present time"—their point of view is considered *internal* to the narrative, on the temporal plane. When the narrator keeps his own temporal position, he adopts a "retrospective" view, which is *external* to the narrative—he looks from the future into the characters' present time.

This combination of *internal* and *external* points of view in the temporal plane enhances the development of layers of perceptions, and thus determines "the degree of complexity of the compositional structure of the work,"⁴² which helps us to reinforce the importance of the frame analysis proposed here.

Our study can be further completed if we analyse how point of view is regarded on the *psychological plane*.

1.4.4. Psychological Plane

On the *psychological* plane "the authorial point of view relies on an individual consciousness (or perception)".⁴³ One of the uses of this psychological view, in the literary text, is to describe behaviour, for a person's behaviour can be described from the *external* view of an outside observer or can be "described from the person himself or from the point of view of an omniscient observer who is permitted to penetrate the consciousness of that person".⁴⁴ The description is characterized by the exposure of internal processes (thoughts, feelings, sensory perceptions, emotions) which can only be grasped by external manifestations of

⁴² USPENSKY, p.66.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.81.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.83.

the person who is observed. This point of view is *internal* to the person described.

In the novel, although internal description is much more important to our analysis, the external description has to be considered in order to establish how it works in terms of the psychological plane.

The *external* description is found to be carried out in two ways in the narrative: *first*, through a “transpersonal”⁴⁵ observer who describes a person with reference to definite facts. He uses phrases like “he did,” “he said” [and] “he announced,” as in the description of Rigaud’s first dialogue with Cavalletto: “‘Get up, pig!’ growled [Rigaud]. ‘Don’t sleep when I am hungry.’ [Cavalletto replies:] ‘I can wake when I will, I can sleep when I will. It’s all the same.’ [...and the narrator comments:] As he said it, he rose, shook himself, scratched himself” (p.3). *Second*, the external description refers to the opinion of the observer: as when talking to Bar about the Dorrits’ and Merdles’ union, “Bishop *seemed to like* his own way of putting the case very much, and rather dwelt upon it” (p.566, my italics). The function of this type of description is to reveal characters’ outward description without any “judgement,” without inferring the inner reasons for their behaviour.

In the *internal* description the omniscient observer uses some special expressions to refer to “the internal consciousness”.⁴⁶ The function of these expressions is to emphasize the way characters are being described and to give us the means to identify their hidden emotions or perceptions. This is mainly done through “*verba sentiendi* [...which are] verbs that express an internal condition [and] function in the text as formal signs of description from an internal point of view”.⁴⁷ In Arthur’s and Little Dorrit’s case, the use of this type

⁴⁵ USPENSKY, p.84.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.85.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.85.

of verb reinforces their roles as observers. When thinking about the time he was engaged to Flora, “Arthur *considered*, [that] that must be a long time hence,” (p.151, my italics); in Little Dorrit’s first visit to Arthur’s room in Covent Garden “[she] looked into a dim room, which *seemed* a spacious one *to her*” (p.166, my italics); or, after the visit to Mrs Merdle’s house Fanny scolds Little Dorrit for humiliating them there and “Little Dorrit *felt* the injustice of this taunt rather sharply” (p.244, my italics); further, “Mrs Flintwinch, on a wintry afternoon at twilight [...] *dreamed* this dream: She *thought* she was in the kitchen [...]” (p.179-186, my italics) which introduces us to another of Affery’s “dreams” and the facts which are revealed through it.

Apart from verbs, there are also some “special modal expressions [...] which occur in the text when the narrator takes an external point of view in describing some internal state (thoughts, feelings, unconscious motives for action) that he cannot be sure about”.⁴⁸ In *Little Dorrit*, the narrator stresses his uncertainty in these cases: first, when talking about her meeting with Miss Wade, “an impatient glance from Tattycoram *seemed*, as Clennam saw it, *to* answer ‘With my eyes!’ But her only answer in words was: ‘I met her near the church’” (p.190, my italics); second, when Pancks was going to Little Dorrit’s garret “the crazy staircase, usually not slow to give notice when any one was coming up or down, here creaked under a quick tread, and a further sound was heard upon it, *as if* a little steam-engine with more steam than it knew what to do with, were working towards the room” (p.384, my italics); and third, “It *appeared* on the whole, *to* Little Dorrit herself, that this same society in which they lived, greatly resembled a superior sort of Marshalsea” (p.511, my italics). These expressions are “words of estrangement” which indicate the presence of a synchronic narrator at the place of action. These words serve to fix not only the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.85.

psychological viewpoint of the observer, but also his temporal and spatial viewpoint. “Thus, the presence in the description of the character’s behaviour of expressions which describe an internal state without these special operators indicates the use of the internal point of view”.⁴⁹

The function of the variations found on the psychological plane for the frame analysis proposed here lies in the fact that the expressions used to indicate the character’s consciousness open layers of perceptions in the narrative text. Each time the character’s consciousness is highlighted the narrator changes the direction of perspective, which forces the reader to a deeper analysis of the text and of the character’s description.

Another relevant variation found on the psychological plane is the use of first person narration. In this case, different characters, conducting the narration in the first person, present different parts of the story. “This kind of composition is [...] connected with the epistolary novel. [...] different actors, functioning as vehicles for the authorial point of view, may alternate in the work with the authorial “I”.⁵⁰

In the novel we have Little Dorrit’s two letters to Arthur. The first starts like this:

I write to you from my own room at Venice, thinking you will be glad to hear from me. But I know you cannot be so glad to hear from me, as I am to write to you; for everything about you is as you have been accustomed to see it, and you miss nothing—unless it should be me, which can only be for a very little while together and very seldom—while everything in my life is so strange, and I miss so much. (p.468)

And Miss Wade’s story, which is also confided to Arthur: “I have the misfortune of not being a fool. From a very early age I have detected what those about me thought they hid from me. If I could have been habitually imposed

⁴⁹ USPENSKY, p.86-87.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.91.

upon, instead of habitually discerning the truth, I might have lived as smoothly as most fools do" (p.663).

The relevance of this change in perspective is related to the fact that "frames" are open in the narrative and such frames introduce a different meaning and a different purpose. The narrator is trying to distance himself from their accounts, but it seems that there is more to be found in this simple change of point of view.

Little Dorrit's letters to Arthur were full of her sensitive observation, something that adds to the effect of her being one of the perspectives through which we perceive the story. As regards Miss Wade, it seems understandable that this self-tormented woman could find in Arthur the one to whom she could confide her innermost feelings and experiences, for he could go, like Little Dorrit, through all the levels of the story. In other words, they were able to have contact with the two different groups of characters related to them without being influenced by their traits. Therefore, this break in the narrative represents much more than a simple confession or the description of facts.

As this sudden variation to first person narration only occurs in the second part of the novel, it seems that here the omniscient narrator steps back in the narrative, making room for the characters to perform freely. This is due to the fact that, in Book II, the point of view becomes more adapted to the changes that occur in the characters' life, for the narrator, after the descriptive narrative required in Book I, and the introduction of the various characters, behaves as an observer, for characters seem to have total "control" over what is going on in the story.

The omniscient perspective, then, suffers many variations along the narrative which will help to form the various "frames" within the structure of the novel. According to Uspensky, what happens here in terms of point of view is

a change of the authorial position in sequence [, for] the author seems to link his point of view with that of one of the characters, as if he were taking part in the action. His position changes, in sequence, from one point of view of one character to another, or from the point of view of a character to his own point of view (the latter device, as well as a general shift of authorial position, is often given the compositional function of *framing*).⁵¹

This “compositional function” attributed to point of view gives us the basis for showing how the omniscient perspective works as a “unifying element” in the arrangement of the structure of *Little Dorrit*, in other words, how it is used to rule and modify the structural and thematic components in the novel. This unifying role is supported by the importance of point of view in the novel as the *essential thing* which controls all other levels of structure. This controlling characteristic is demonstrated in Graphic IX, page 91, where the *internal bracketing* of the novel can be observed. The graphic follows the same type of representation found in Graphic II; however, it deals with a different level of framing, for it presents the components which are contained within the “internal brackets” of the novel.

Through the analysis of the different planes in which omniscient point of view suffers variations, we could notice that in each one of them a “break” occurs in the frame established: perspective is regarded as “external” and “internal” in ideological, phraseological, spatial/temporal and psychological terms. The narrator’s own point of view and that of the protagonists, Arthur and Little Dorrit, as seen in Graphic X, page 92, control the break. Paradoxically, this same “breaking device” works as the “unifying element” in the structure of the novel.

Another step taken for tracing the structural relevance of point of view was to analyse its *interrelating function*, for such a function established a relationship between point of view and the other elements pertaining to the

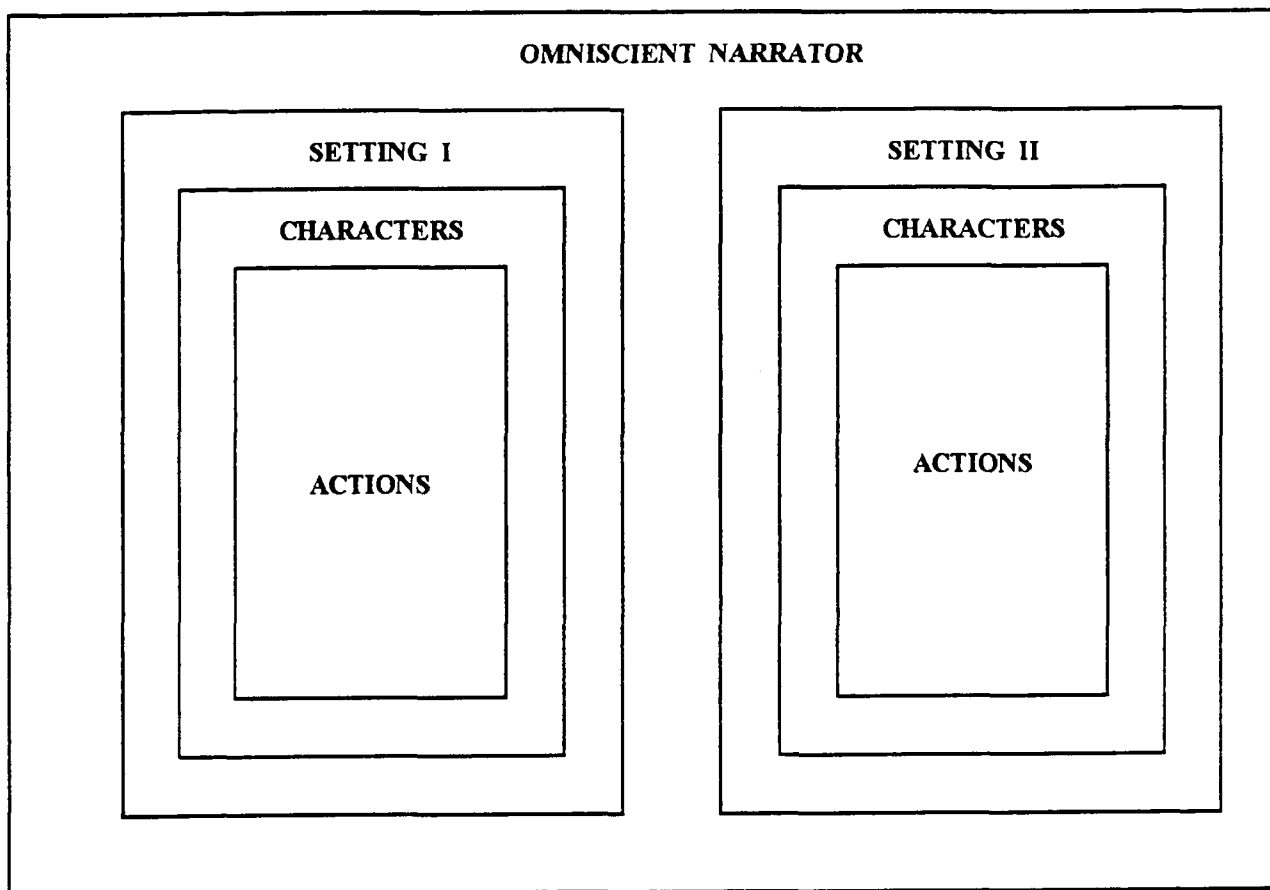
⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.89, my italics.

novel, as seen in Graphic XI, page 93. With this vertical cut across the first part of the novel, point of view is perceived as connecting the elements in Book I. Consequently, this first link established the basis for the cross-correspondence between both parts of the novel, which provides us with the *correlating function of point of view*, as seen in Graphic XII, page 94. This approach highlights the way the *literal frames* organize and balance the distribution of their structural contents. Graphic XIII, page 95, shows us how the first person narration breaks the narrative in Book II.

GRAPHIC IX

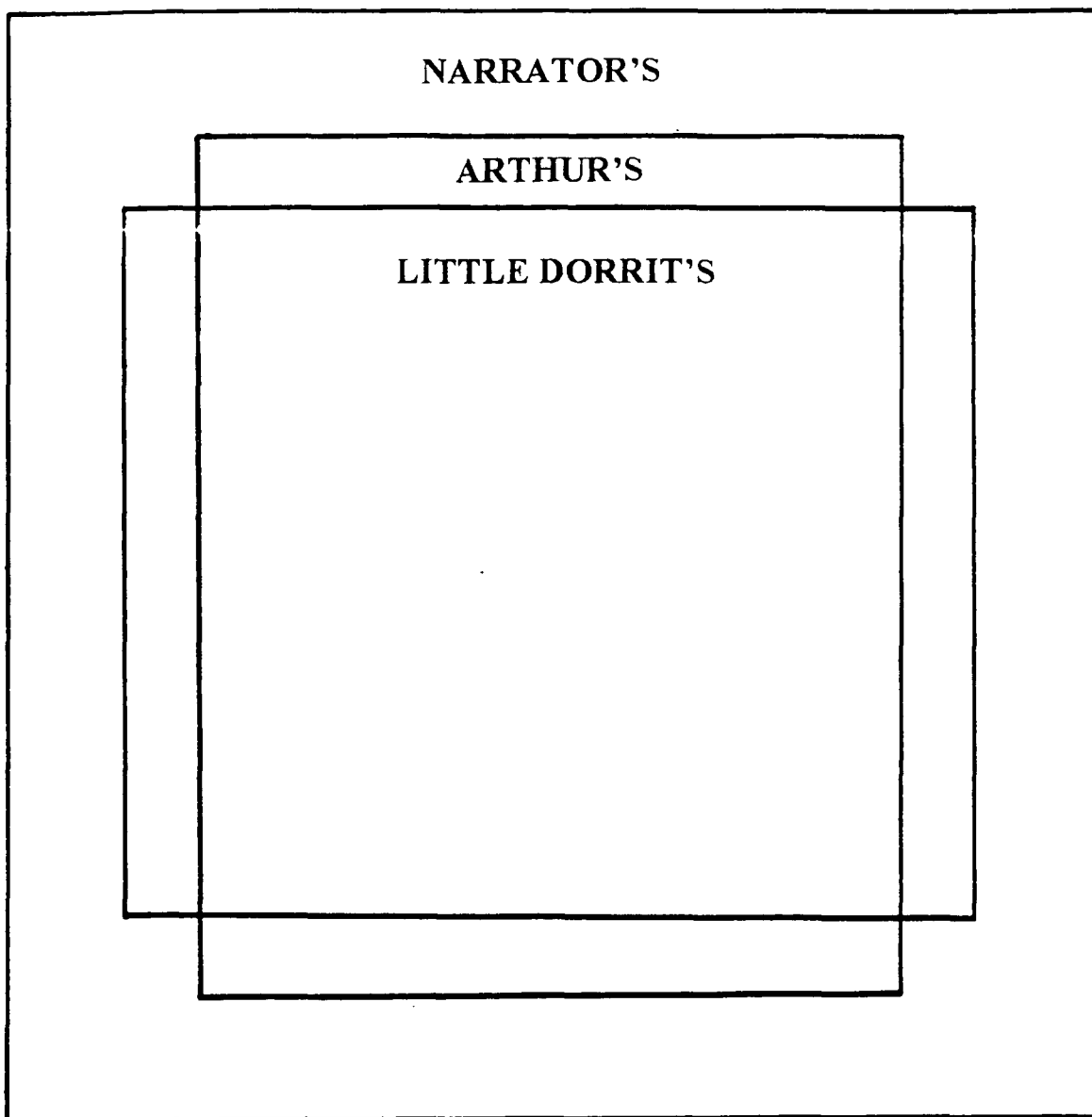
Internal Bracketing

- Point of View - The Unifying Element in the Novel



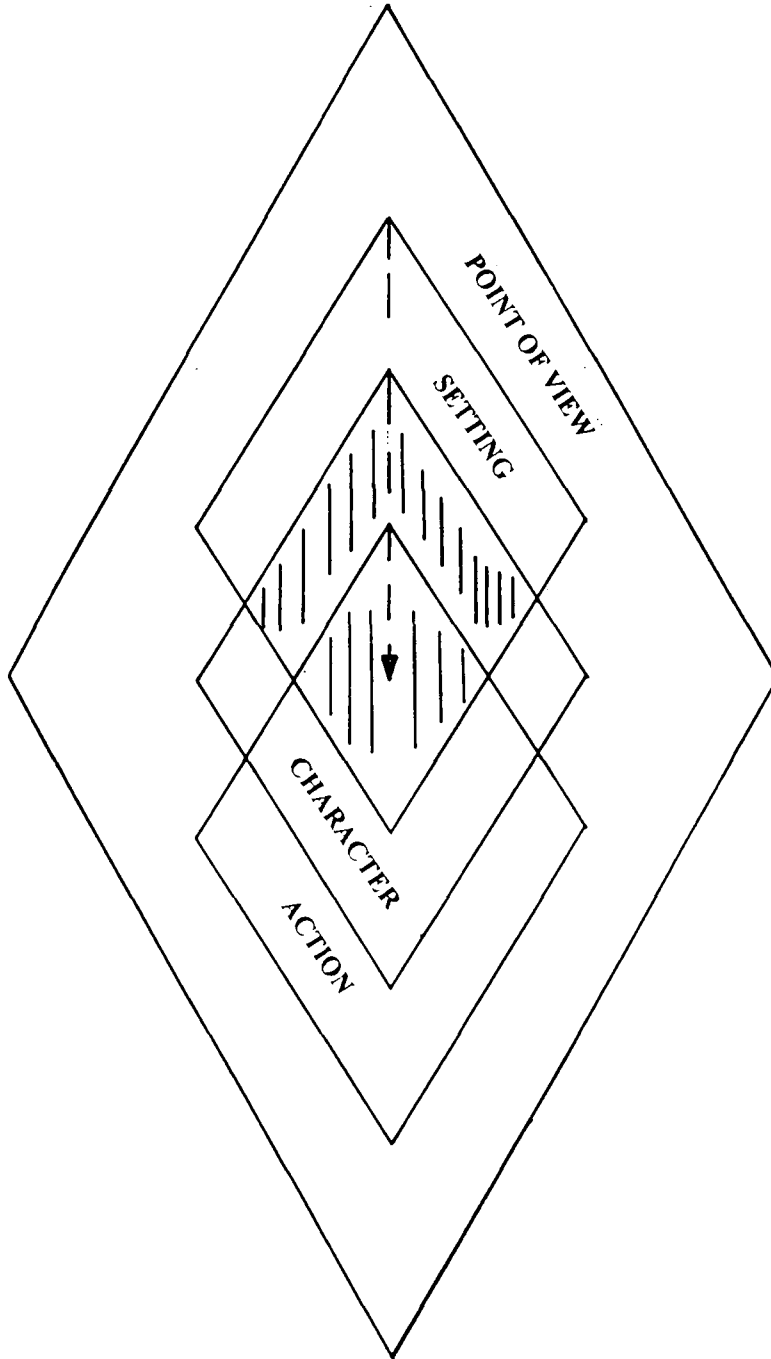
GRAPHIC X

External and Internal Points of View



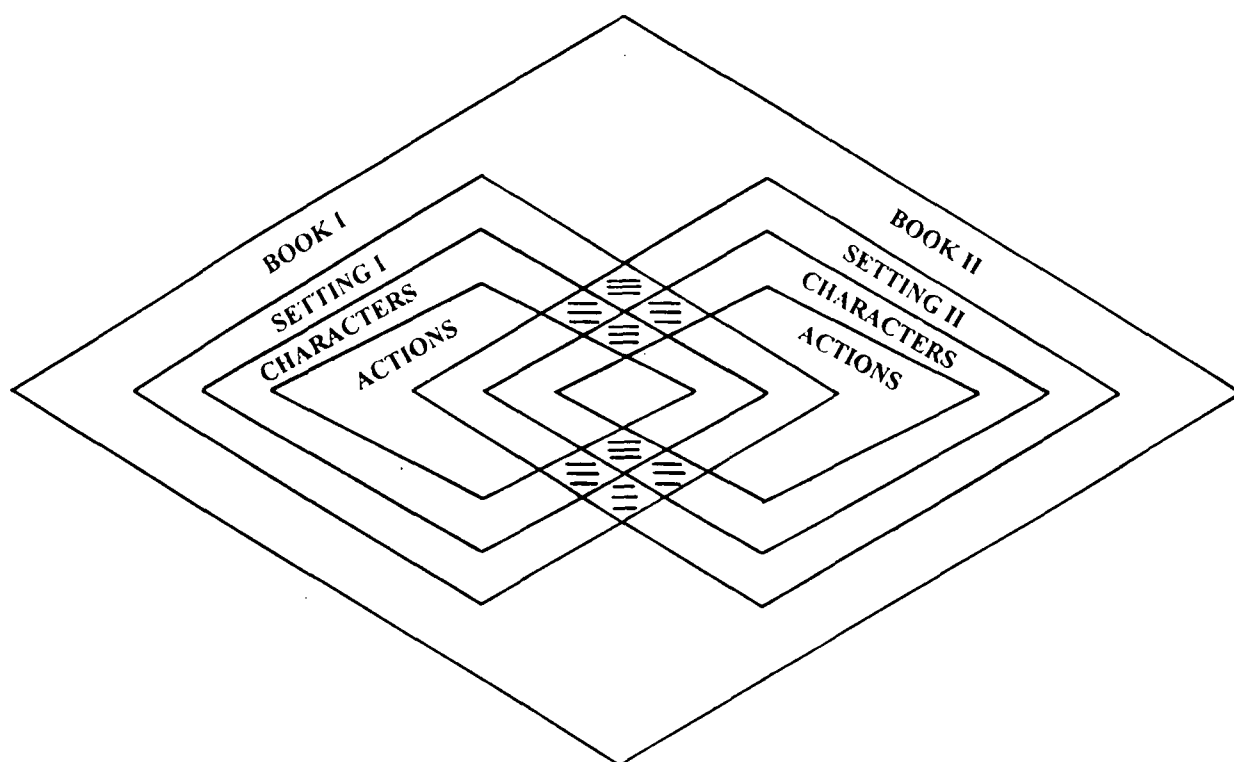
GRAPHIC XI

Book I - The Interrelating Function of Point of View



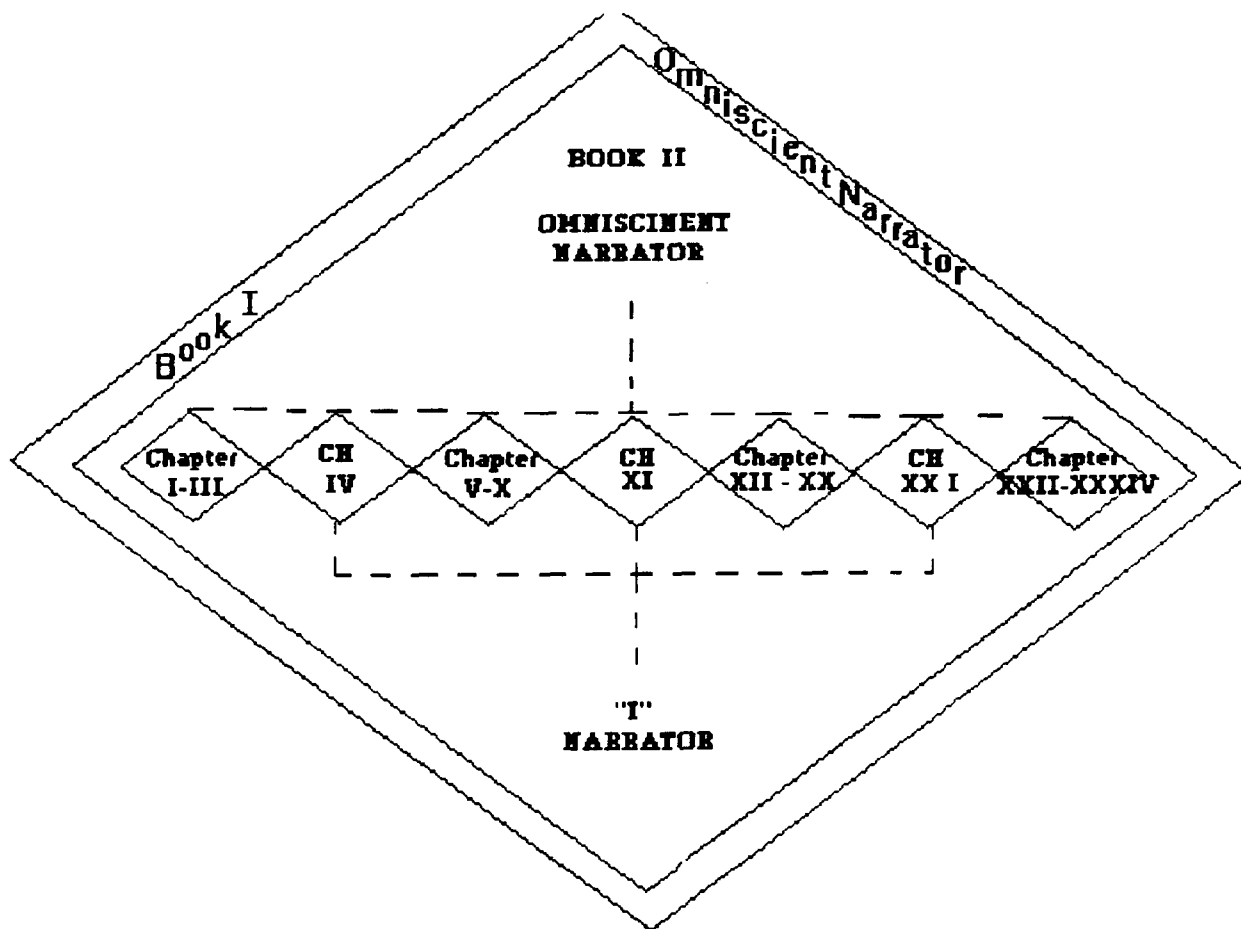
GRAPHIC XII

Books I/II - The Correlating Function of Point of View



GRAPHIC XIII

Books I/II - First Person Narration as a Framing Device



1.5. Chronotopical Frames and their Interrelationship

As a further development in this analysis, Books I and II will be studied according to the interrelationship of space/time, and what the function is of such a link, how the author uses the various settings presented in the first part of the novel as foreshadowing elements for what is to come in the second half.

As Goffman comments in relation to temporal and spatial brackets,

activity framed in a particular way—especially collectively organized social activity—is often marked off from the ongoing flow of surrounding events by a special set of boundary markers or brackets of a conventionalized kind. These occur before and after the activity in time and may be circumscriptive in space; in brief, there are temporal and spatial brackets. These markers, like the wooden frame of a picture, are presumably neither part of the content of activity proper nor part of the world outside the activity but rather both inside and outside, a paradoxical condition [...] One may speak, then, of opening and closing temporal brackets and bounding spatial brackets.¹

The controlling nature of the temporal and spatial brackets gives us the means to specify the devices used to organize the social interaction in the novel and to analyse how characters interact physically and psychologically with such boundaries.

Goffman's theory will be further complemented by Bakhtin's concept of the *chronotope*—"the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature,"²—as "organizing centers [or frames] for the fundamental narrative events of the novel [...] where the knots of narrative are tied and untied [...] for] to them belongs the meaning that shapes the narrative". As he also comments, the chronotope functions "as

¹ GOFFMAN, p.251-252.

² HOLQUIST, M. (ed.) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Texas, 1986, p.85.

the primary means for materializing space and time [...] providing the ground essential for showing-forth the representability of events”.³

Thus, apart from its functions as brackets and organizing centres within the structure of the novel, the *space/time* relationship will be explored further: *space* will also work as a mirror of the characters’ inner traits and behaviour, while the interchange between past and present will affect the characters, chronologically and psychologically.

As a strategy for analysis we will first deal with the physical spatial frame as seen in Books I and II. Moreover, we will also emphasize the first three chapters of Book I in order to demonstrate “internal spatial” frames found in the novel, as they are decisive ones in establishing the structural elements in the story.

1.5.1. Spatial Frame

At first sight, the spatial framework of *Little Dorrit* seems to be formed by various independent “chronotopes” which stand by themselves without any interrelationships. Although we start to analyse them in terms of isolated clusters in relation to their immediate surroundings and to their internal features, what will appear is an intricate pattern of related clusters.

The first chronotope in the framework represents one of the main chronotopes in the novel: the “city”. *Marseilles*, located in southern France (which represents a different chronotope—a “foreign country”) can be said to play the role of an “alien world,” of the exotic, the mysterious and the universal in contrast to England. The sense of universality is perceived through its description as a city with a “universal staring habit” (p.1), therefore, a city invaded by “sun,” by “light,” where objects and people cannot be kept hidden. In order to emphasize its universality the city is inhabited by foreign people:

³ *Ibid.*, p.250.

“Hindoos, Russians, Chinese, Spaniards, Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Genovese, Neapolitans, Venetians, Greeks, Turks, descendants from all the builders of Babel” (p.1). In its universality, the city is also pointed out, by Cavalletto, on a map on the floor of the prison, which denotes its limitless and open relationship with the outside world (p.4). This relationship is emphasized by the mental journey made by the reader into “long dusty roads and interminable plains,” which reinforces the idea of universality related to the city, the expansion of space presented by the narrator.

The “city” chronotope encompasses subordinate ones. In describing them, the narrator makes a link between the particular and the universal. He goes from the city into the *fields*, into *distant lands*, and then returns to Marseilles, but to a specific place, the *prison*, thus completing a circular trajectory. This circularity is conveyed through the author’s allusion to Marseilles’s “fervid sky, white houses [...] white walls [...] white streets [...] tracts of arid road [...] hills [and, then,] the *harbour*” (p.1, my italics). At this point we reach a place which stands for arrival and departure of people and goods, the “gate” to this universal city, a place of change/exchange, of movement forward/backward. It is a connection with the sea, as “the line of demarcation [...] showed the point which the pure sea would not pass” (p.1), representing the boundaries of the city. These boundaries are highlighted through the description given to the harbour—its “foul water,” “the abominable pool” contrasted with the “beautiful sea” that “lays quiet,” the contrasting “black and blue” colours which remain unmixed “night and day”. From the “harbour” we move to “the distant line of Italian coast [..., to] far away [...] roads [...] the hill-side [...] the hollow [...] the interminable plain [...] the dusty vines overhanging wayside cottages [...] wayside avenues [...] towards the interior [...] the fields [...] the churches [...] into a fiery river [and, then, back to] Marseilles” (p.1-2). These sites represent places where people walk, meet, work,

pray, in sum, places where life flows, where life achieves a sense of universality. These are places where the “great jewel of fire” stares at people and things as if it was trying to discover any mystery, any secret that might be concealed in their lives. That is the powerful “sun,” watching all, knowing all.

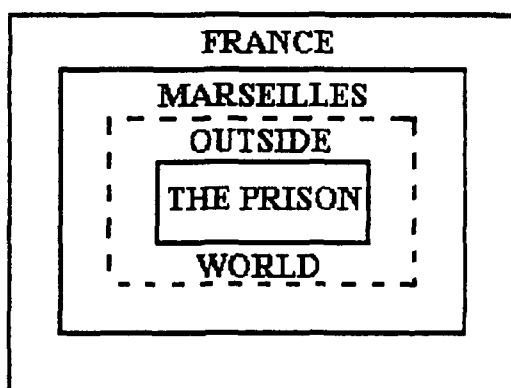
Back in Marseilles, then, inserted in the first main chronotope, we find a *villainous prison*. In contrast to the blinding sunshine “staring” at the city, it is “so repulsive a place” (p.2), a shadow inside the bright city, for “even the obtrusive stare” avoided it. The foul atmosphere in it is rendered even worse by its gruesome description: “A prison taint was on everything there. The imprisoned air [...] light [...] damp [...] men, were all deteriorated by confinement [...] the captive men were faded and haggard, [...] the iron was rusty, the stone [...] slimy, the wood [...] rotten [...] the air [...] faint, the light [...] dim” (p.3).

In the prison there are subordinate chronotopes to it: the *chamber*, which represents the microcosm where the “two men” are found; the *iron grating* representing their only “open” link to the external world; the *door*, that was their passage into life or death, and the *staircase* which was “ascended and descended,” representing the movement in and out of prison.

The prison, “the infernal hole” (p.8) represents not only physical and moral imprisonment but will also stand for an extension of the characters’ inner lives which are marked by shadowy, hidden elements.

If we consider how the city and the prison are presented in the first chapter of the novel, we can say that they form a spatial pattern:

GRAPHIC XIV



Where the city is cosmopolitan and open to the world. The prison is secluded, in opposition to the city, and closed inside it.

This graphic differs from the general spatial frame in Graphics XIX and XX, pages 120 and 121, as it is intrinsically closed within itself. This closed framework pertains to the inner structure of the novel while the more general one pertains to the surface structure of the novel.

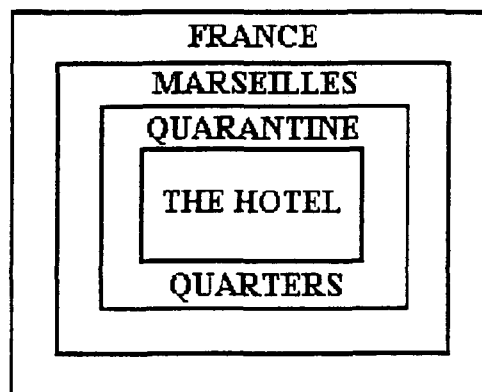
Still inside the first chronotope we find the third main one—the *Quarantine Quarters*—a chronotope which embodies the idea of “space and time,” simultaneously. The “quarantine,” which is within the borders of Marseilles but separated from it by the harbour, not only expresses the idea of a “forced” imprisonment but also the idea of illness, of a threatening “plague” that is brought from “the East country”. This quick passage through the quarantine quarters, also referred to as “a madhouse,” may represent more than the gathering together of “fellow travellers;” it can also represent an incongruity, a paradox, for the city introduced in the previous chapter is itself surrounded by “foul water,” although it seems to be trying to protect itself from foreign diseases as the travellers are coming from the East. The quarantine, then, has the same function as the Great Saint Bernard Convent—it is an “organizing centre” in

which travellers are gathered together and presented before pursuing their respective ways.

In addition to the quarantine quarters we distinguish other subordinate chronotopes, such as the “harbour,” which is the only link with Marseilles, and “a great hotel whence the sun was excluded by closed lattices, and where bare paved floors, lofty ceilings, and resounding corridors, tempered the intense heat”(p.21). This hotel serves as a point of transition between the outside world, represented by Marseilles, and the world in which the story is fully developed, London.

Graphic XV shows the inner frame structure of the third chronotope:

GRAPHIC XV



From Marseilles, we move to the next main chronotope, that is, the city of *London*, which opens up another frame in the structure of the novel. Here we are introduced to the place where most of the novel’s action takes place and where we are introduced to various characters.

London, in contrast with Marseilles, is introduced to us in a “gloomy, close and stale” (p.28) atmosphere. Where

maddening *church* bells of all degrees of dissonance, sharp and flat, cracked and clear, fast and slow, made the brick-and-mortar

echoes hideous. Melancholy *streets* in a penitential garb of soot, steeped the souls of the people which were condemned to look at them out of *windows*, in dire despondency [...] Everything was bolted and barred that could by possibility furnish relief to an overworked people. No pictures, no unfamiliar animals, no rare plants or flowers, no natural or artificial wonders of the ancient world [...] Nothing to see but streets, streets, streets. Nothing to breathe but streets, streets, streets. (p.28, my italics)

In this first description⁴ Dickens presents three important subordinate chronotopes, namely, the *church*, the *streets* and the *windows*. The first one, the *church*, with its “maddening bells” is there to remind people of their religious duty and to “urge the populace in a voluble manner to Come to church, Come to church, Come to church!” (p.29). This summoning chant represents the “stern” religiousness which will permeate the whole novel in the figure of Mrs Clennam—a religion which advocates the punishment of its sinful followers and the banishment of evil.

Second, there are the *streets*, where the veins of the labyrinthine world of the city are; where people had to walk by day and night despite the “penitential garb of soot;” where there was mud and “foul stale smells [which were] a sickly, lukewarm, dirt-stained, wretched addition to the gutters [uncovered by the rain]” (p.31); where dull, “responsible houses” (p.28) piled themselves “in a dismal scene” and would keep “frowning as heavily on the streets they composed as if they were every one inhabited by the ten young men of the Calender’s story, who blackened their faces and bemoaned their miseries every night” (p.28); where people would toil and follow their way, not knowing each other and of the ways that would put them together in life.

⁴ The importance of description in Dickens’s work is emphasized by Marten, who states that his “works progress through interrelated, yet distinct, visual frames. We are swept up by the pictorial vividness and intricacy of each unit. The individual scenes are immediately fascinating in their own right at which time our concern with narrative or moral is secondary. The impact of the scenes comes most immediately from the relations among the elements within them (scenic details, characters) and then gradually from the relation to the whole” (MARTEN, H.P. “The Visual Imagination of Dickens and Hogarth: Structure and Scene.” *Studies in the Novel*. 6 (Summer 1974): 150).

Third, the *window* is the very “frame” through which the “dismal scene” of the city is observed and perceived. In this chapter Arthur Clennam, newly arrived from Marseilles, “sat in the window of a coffee-house on Ludgate Hill” and observed his surroundings and heard the “neighbouring bells,” a scene which reminded him of an environment left long ago. The window, then, becomes a kind of “gate” through which reality can be transposed or observed. It is a physical boundary, a “frame” which enables people to hide within it or just use it to keep reality at a distance. The window is one of the most significant elements in the novel, as will be seen later.

Mrs Clennam’s *house*, another main chronotope, which is inserted in the “city,” plays an important role as organizing centre in the novel, for it is responsible for one of the relevant frames we have in terms of space. Mrs Clennam’s house was

an old brick house, so dingy as to be all but black, standing by itself within a gateway. Before it, a square court-yard where a shrub or two and a patch of grass were as rank (which is saying much) as the iron railings enclosing them were rusty; behind it, a jumble of roots. It was a double house, with long, narrow, heavily-framed windows. Many years ago, it had it in its mind to slide down sideways; it had been propped up, however, and was leaning on some half-dozen gigantic crutches: which gymnasium for the neighbouring cats, weather-stained, smoke-blackened, and overgrown with weeds, appeared in these latter days to be no very sure reliance. (p.31)

If we consider some of the qualifiers with which this house and its components are described—“old, dingy, rank, rusty, heavily-framed, weather-stained, smoke-blackened”—we notice a careful combination denoting decay, an idea that is related, first, to the house, as it stands as a symbol of decay, of the past reflected in the present, and second to the people who inhabit it, as Mrs Clennam, Jeremiah and Affery are portrayed with the signs of the “dereliction” of the place.

The interior of Arthur's house is as relevant as the outside, for within the "heavy shadows" of its spare, meagre dining-room

old articles of furniture were in their old places; the Plagues of Egypt, much the dimmer for the fly and smoke plagues of London, were framed and glazed upon the walls. There was the old cellaret with nothing in it, lined with lead, like a sort of coffin in compartments; there was the old dark closet, also with nothing in it, [...] There was the large, hard-featured clock on the sideboard [...] the staircase, which was panelled off into spaces like so many mourning tablets, into a dim bed-chamber, the floor of which had gradually so sunk and settled, that the fireplace was in a dell. (p.32-33)

The interior of the house, then, with its "frozen" objects and furniture, again reinforces its effect on its inhabitants.⁵ Its sombre atmosphere, its hard-featured objects, could be said to express not only the idea of a decayed past but also of "fossilized" inhabitants. The amount of detail given in its description also guides us in relation to its relevance to the story and the "prison" theme running through it. In order to give us a complete view of this old house the narrator leads us, together with Arthur and Affery,

up and up, through the musty smell of an old close house, little used, to a large garret bed-room. Meagre and spare, like all the other rooms, it was even uglier and grimmer than the rest, by being the place of banishment for the worn-out furniture. Its movables were *ugly* old chairs with worn-out seats, and *ugly* old chairs without any seats; a threadbare patternless carpet, a *maimed* table, a *crippled* wardrobe, a *lean* set of fire-irons like the skeleton of a set deceased, a washing-stand that looked as if it had stood for ages in a hail of dirty soapsuds, and a bedstead with four bare atomies of posts, each terminating in a spike, as if for the dismal accommodation of lodgers who might prefer to impale themselves. (p.37-38, my italics)

⁵ According to Williams, in this type of description, "the house and the life being lived in it are indistinguishable [...] This method is very remarkable. It has its basis, of course, in certain properties of the language: perceptions of relations between persons and things. But in Dickens it is critical. It is a conscious way of seeing and showing. The [house] is shown as at once a social fact and a human landscape. What is dramatized in it is a very complex structure of feelings" (WILLIAMS, R. *The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1973, p. 35 and 37).

What should be emphasized here is the human-like characteristics given to the old pieces of furniture,⁶ suggesting that even these old articles were able to “feel and suffer,” together with the inhabitants of the house, their own physical misfortunes and decay, something that echoes the stress of the relationship between characters and the environment they live in.

In reaching the top of the house we cover most of the subordinate chronotopes inside it—the *dining-room*, with its cellaret and closet, the *staircase*, the *bed-chamber*, and the *garret*—a group of chronotopes which help to reveal how this “blank and dreary” house was, in early days, used as “a place of business,” in sum, of life and activity, but now is “a mere anomaly and incongruity [...] out of date and out of purpose” (p.46). In order to grasp the meaning of these words perhaps we should analyse what Arthur found when he “looked through the whole house:”

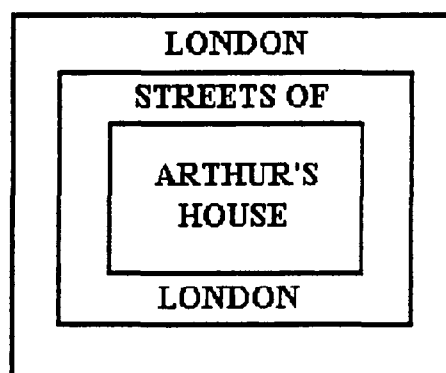
The *gaunt* rooms, deserted for years upon years, seemed to have settled down into a *gloomy lethargy* from which nothing could rouse them again. The furniture, at once *spare and lumbering*, hid in the rooms rather than furnished them, and there was *no colour* in all the house; such colour as had ever been there, had long ago started away on lost sunbeams [...] There was *not one straight* floor, from the foundation to the roof; the ceilings were so *fantastically clouded* by smoke and dust, that old women might have told fortunes in them better than in grouts of tea; the *dead-cold* hearths showed no traces of having ever been warmed, but in heaps of soot that had tumbled down the chimneys, and eddied about in little dusky whirlwinds when the doors were opened. In what had once been a drawing-room, there were a pair of *meagre* mirrors, with *dismal* processions of black figures [...] The room of Arthur Clennam’s deceased father [...] was [...] *unaltered* [...] Down in the cellarets, as up in the bed-chambers, old objects that he well remembered were *changed by age and decay*, but were *still in their old places*. (p.54, my italics)

⁶ Ireland states that Dickens’s use of “humanization, the investment of objects, animals, and abstractions normally held to lack sentience with the motions and characteristics of human beings, has aroused much speculation. Spiritual and moral, aesthetic, and ontological grounds have been advanced for such metaphors of transformation, which, however, can be regarded primarily as agents of imaginative vision whereby perception is heightened and intensified” (IRELAND, p.141).

This description depicts the house at its deepest level. The words emphasized convey the idea of dereliction, shabbiness and of the gloomy atmosphere which “fantastically clouds” the house and its inhabitants. The scanty, dismal, unaltered pieces of scattered furniture also denote how the house is physically depleted, in the same way that its inhabitants are emotionally depleted. Both are utterly depersonalized. Therefore, the interior of the house and its furniture mirror the process of downfall of the Clennams’ personal life and business. In this sense, characters and their environment form an amalgam, as the interior of one is expressed in the exterior of the other.⁷ Moreover, the house, if compared to the Marshalsea, is also characterized as a “dead-cold” prison, for Mrs Clennam’s life there was determined by a self-inflicted physical and psychological imprisonment.

Graphic XVI shows the inner framework of the chronotopes analysed above:

GRAPHIC XVI



Apart from Mrs Clennam’s house, London also has a series of *other houses*, “claustrophobic” chronotopes, which mirror their inhabitants’ physical

⁷ According to Barickman, “it is probably safe to say that every important element in Dickens’s major psychological themes throughout the novels finds vivid expression in the description of places, sometimes more expressive than the characters themselves” (BARICKMAN, R.B. “The Comedy of Survival in Dickens’s Novels.” *Novel* 11 (Winter 1978):132).

and psychological description and the ideas they express. These houses not only represent inner and subordinate chronotopes, but they will form the basis for the frame established by the “city” of London within the novel.

Mr. Tite Barnacle’s, for example, was “a *squeezed* house, with a ramshackle bowed front, *little dingy* windows, and a *little dark* area like a damp waistcoat-pocket, [...] to the sense of smell, the house was like a sort of bottle filled with strong distillation of mews” (p.110, my italics). The house, then, within its narrow limits, is in accordance with the stinginess and narrow-mindedness of the family which inhabited it and with their sense of superficial superiority to the “Public” they tried to manipulate.

Another example of this type of house would be Mr. Casby’s: a “sober, silent and air-tight” house which was “as gloomy and little changed” as Arthur’s, with its “bright brass knocker of obsolete shape [...and its] faded scents [where] the furniture was formal, grave, and quaker-like, but well-kept; and had as prepossessing an aspect as anything, from a human creature to a wooden stool, that is meant for much use and is preserved for little, can ever wear” (p.145), a house that resembles those who inhabit it by showing us a sense of immutability, of sobriety and of stiffness. If compared to the Barnacles’, Mr. Casby’s air-tight atmosphere comes close to the narrowness and tightness of the former house, a characteristic that is clearly related to their stinginess.

Within this same “stifling” group of houses we also have Miss Wade’s “hiding” places. The first was: “a dingy house [...] with bills in the windows [...] The bills as a variety in the funeral procession, almost amounted to a decoration, [...its] confined entrance was [...] dark [and inside there was] an airless room” (p.326). The second, visited by Arthur, was

a *dead* sort of house, with a *dead* wall over the way and a *dead* gateway at the side, where a pendant bell-handle produced two *dead* tinkles, and a knocker produced a *dead*, flat, surface-tapping, that seemed not to have depth enough in it to penetrate

even the cracked door. However, the door jarred open on a *dead* sort of spring; and he closed it behind him as he entered a dull yard, soon brought to a close at the back by another *dead* wall, where an attempt had been made to train some creeping shrubs, which were *dead*, and to make a little fountain in a grotto, which was *dry*; and to decorate that with a little statue which was *gone*. (p.654, my italics)

Dickens's "deadly" play on words is clearly denoting Miss Wade's own "lifeless" behaviour; however, it seems to go deeper than her meanness. Such a dead atmosphere, such dryness, seem to be linked to an immeasurable and uncontrolled darkness that may be found only in death—something very clearly linked to Miss Wade's spiritual death.

Juxtaposed with these oppressive, repressive and gloomy houses we have Mr. Merdle's "showy house, [an] establishment of state" (p.246) which, paradoxically, denotes not only the grandeur of its inhabitants but also their dullness, grimness and loftiness, for its expressionless form represents Society, its address represents Society and its arrogance represents Society.

However, London has another side, that of *the Marshalsea Prison*, a chronotope which creates a secluded and completely different world within that of the city—a deeper layer within the frame formed by the city. The Marshalsea was

an oblong pile of barrack building, partitioned into squalid houses standing back to back, so that there were no back rooms; environed by a narrow paved yard, hemmed in by high walls duly spiked at top. Itself a close and confined prison for debtors, it contained within it a much closer and more confined jail for smugglers [...who would be] incarcerated behind an iron-plated door, closing up a second prison, consisting of a strong cell or two, and a blind alley some yard and a half wide, which formed the mysterious termination of the very limited skittle-ground in which the Marshalsea debtors bowled down their troubles. (p.57)

The Marshalsea, this powerful symbol of physical and psychological imprisonment—something hinted at in the first chapter of the novel—seems to

stand as much more than a place of confinement, for, like many other chronotopes in the novel, it also has its dual connotation, its extremes, since the Marshalsea goes beyond the barriers imposed by its physical and psychological bounds. Paradoxically, this prison is also sustained as a “home”, as a place of retreat and comfort, especially if we link it to Little Dorrit. Within the limits of the prison, at its spiked top, we find Little Dorrit’s bedroom:

A garret, and a Marshalsea garret without compromise, was Little Dorrit’s room. *Beautifully* kept, it was *ugly* in itself, and had little but *cleanliness* and *air* to set it off; for what embellishment she had ever been able to buy, had gone to her father’s room. Howbeit, for this *poor* place she showed an *increasing love*; and to sit in it alone became her favourite rest. (p.291, my italics)

Despite the contrasts found within its physical description, this is one of the few places in the novel which reflects warmth, cosiness and positive self-identification. It is “clean” and “airy” and is treated with “increasing love.” Such identification can only be possible owing to Little Dorrit’s righteousness and wholeness. The Marshalsea, then, being this unobtrusive spiked tyrant with its “lock, key and turnkey” which threatened and filled some members of Little Dorrit’s family with utter abhorrence, was a place which, despite its ugliness and unattractiveness, encompassed the parallel and contradictory forces running through the novel. This could be identified as one of the examples of the strength of the novel—the ability to blur the polarity of the positive and the negative at the same time that it tries to convey it.

Apart from the Marshalsea, Dickens also adds another idiosyncratic chronotope, *Bleeding Heart Yard*, which was

a place much changed in feature and in fortune, yet with some relish of ancient greatness about it. Two or three mighty stacks of chimneys, and a few large dark rooms which had escaped being walled and subdivided out of the recognition of their old proportions, gave the Yard a *character*. It was inhabited by poor people, who set up their rest among its faded glories, as Arabs of the desert pitch their tents among the fallen stones of the

Pyramids; but there was a family sentimental feeling prevalent in the Yard, that it had a *character*. As if the aspiring city had become puffed up in the very ground on which it stood, the ground had so risen about Bleeding Heart Yard that you got into it down a flight of steps which formed no part of the original approach, and got out of it by a low gateway into a maze of shabby streets, which went about and about, tortuously ascending to the level again. (p.135)

In spite of its shabbiness, this place has a *character*, a detail that almost conflicts with the important owners of the houses mentioned above. Even the descending/ascending movement done to get in/out of the Yard denotes its contrasting and lower position in relation to the city. Paradoxically, despite the poverty depicted in the Yard, it also “contained” happiness, for the Plornishes inhabited “Happy Cottage” (p.574), which represents a portion of positiveness and cheerfulness in it. This cottage characterizes the “family sentimental feeling” of the Yard which, with its straightforward, meaningful name, becomes a microcosm of the “aspiring city” in which it is inserted. This microcosm is clearly perceived if we consider how much of the city can be found in it, for the Yard, in its diminutive way, depicted almost all the problems we find in the great city. In the first place, the Bleeding Hearts had a landlord, Mr. Casby, the Patriarch, who “squeezed” them as much as he could, a character who can be clearly compared to the “Great Merdle,” someone who also “squeezed” his Society in the same outrageous way; second, like the Bleeding Hearts, the inmates of the Marshalsea prison are outcasts, nameless, poor and despised, which puts them on the same level in Society.

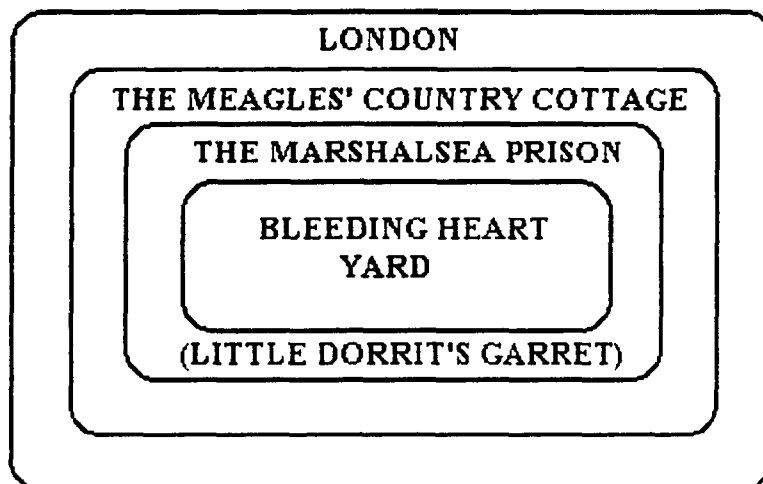
In order to emphasize the contrasting atmosphere showed in the first part of the novel we should mention that within the idyllic outskirts of London, more precisely, in Twickenham, we find a clearly different place which denotes, as much as the houses mentioned above, its interrelatedness with its owner’s characteristics. The Meagles’ country cottage-residence was “just *large enough*,

and no more; was as *pretty* within as it was without, and as *perfectly well-arranged* and *comfortable*" (p.192, my italics), a house that very much accorded with the Meagles' positive attitude within the story and their "comfortable" relationship with other people and each other.

This difference in atmosphere and place strengthens the interplay of the positive and the negative within the frame structure formed by the city of London. The city becomes the area in which antagonistic chronotopes help to form one of the basic rules for the development of the dual structure of the novel, as shown in Graphics XVII and XVIII below:

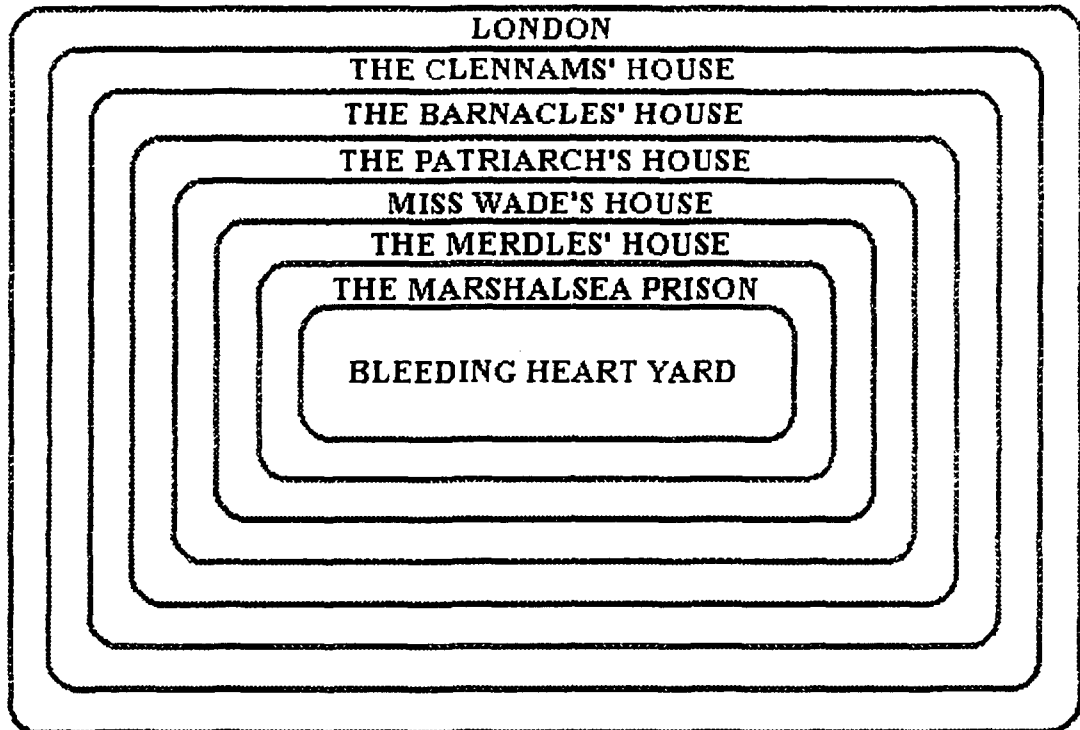
GRAPHIC XVII

POSITIVE



GRAPHIC XVII

NEGATIVE



Through the elements found in Book I we notice that the function of the spatial frame in relation to the structuralization of the novel is of primary importance, for it helps to organize the various elements pertaining to the foreground and background of the story.

Attention will now be given to the correspondence we can establish between the chronotopes analysed above, which belong to Book I, and those we find in Book II. The relevance of this correspondence lies in the fact that both parts of the novel, despite the unit they form, maintain their own characteristics.

The first correspondence to be made between Books I and II in relation to chronotopes is that both begin in *Europe*, a foreign land—one in *Marseilles* and the other in *Switzerland*. This is much more than a simple

coincidence, for the deliberate location of the story outside England gives its development a new dimension. Here, not only is the characters' status different but so is the way they relate to the outside world; their horizon seems expanded even further if they are in a different land, outside the boundaries of their country. However, one of the similarities we detect between these two countries is that the seemingly unlimited foreign space is as claustrophobic and narrow as the places the characters left behind. In *the Great Saint Bernard convent* this narrowness is strongly emphasized, for in it "there were strong arched galleries, huge stone piers, great staircases, and thick walls pierced with small sunken windows—fortifications against the mountain storms, as if they had been human enemies" (p.434). This is a description that not only revives in our memory all the places of imprisonment that have already been seen in the novel but prepares us for its real atmosphere: "Here and there, the bare walls were broken by an iron grate, and [Little Dorrit] thought as she went along that the place was something like a prison" (p.442). More than just by coincidence, here the chronotope is still endowed with the same prison-like taint we saw in the first part of the novel, which makes us wonder at the reasons for such an effect. The explanation is that the Great Saint Bernard has almost the same function as *the Quarantine Quarters*, as mentioned above, the difference being that people were not kept there against their will, for in the convent we also have the gathering together of another "group of people," travellers who will experience each other's action and reaction in this part of the story. This group of people also maintains a degree of correspondence with the first one at the Quarantine; there is Mrs Gowan, "Pet" (the Meagles' daughter), Mr. Gowan (who was related to Miss Wade), the Dorrits (who are related to Arthur) and Blandois (formerly Rigaud, the French gentleman). Therefore, the correspondence between these two chronotopes is almost complete. Another detail that can be added to it is the fact that Dickens, in Book II, also seems to endow this second group of

characters with the same levels of relationship of the first group in the novel although they are not aware of the bounds that tie them all together. Their interaction will be as important as that established through the first group.

Apart from Switzerland, characters go further in their journey until they arrive in *Italy*, another chronotope which will play an important role in the novel. In *Venice* we find two contrasting chronotopes: the “palace (itself six times as big as the whole Marshalsea) on the Grand Canal,” (p.466) where the Dorrits live and “Mrs Gowan’s lodging [which was] fearfully out of the way, [reached] through a complexity of narrow streets of water, [considered] as mere ditches” (p.491). These two “chronotopes” not only differ in addresses but in characteristics, for Mrs Gowan’s house,

on a little desert island, looked as if it had broken away from somewhere else, and had floated by chance into its present anchorage, [...] On the first-floor of the house was a Bank [...] Below the Bank was a suite of three or four rooms with barred windows, which had the appearance of a jail for criminal rats. Above the Bank was Mrs Gowan’s residence. Notwithstanding that its walls were blotched, [...] notwithstanding that its weird furniture was forlornly faded and musty, and that the prevailing Venetian odour of bilge water and an ebb tide on a weedy shore was very strong; the place was better within. (p.490-491)

The shabby “residence” which is referred to as “Mrs Gowan’s,” is clearly contrasted with the Meagles’ cosy country cottage, apart from standing for Gowan’s attitude towards his marriage and his wife. The fact that it is strategically placed above a Bank and a prison also denotes Gowan’s deceitful character towards money and life. This chronotope corroborates the idea that Venice, despite its beauty, also retains a prison-like effect, for Little Dorrit cannot help comparing its society and appearance to the Marshalsea prison (p.511), an impression that is repeated on her arrival in Rome (p.512).

The continuous importance given to the relationship between chronotopes and atmosphere indicates not only a structural strategy used by the

author but also the fact that these different chronotopes mirror one another, which reinforces their overshadowing influence on the characters' behaviour.

Dickens also maintains a correspondence between chronotopes in the two parts of the novel in a sense that they not only complete each other but also form a gallery of frames in which the same elements presented in one part find distinctive places in the other, thus completing their function within the story, as seen in Graphics XIX and XX, pages 120 and 121.

Our next step is to study *time* and its intrinsic relationship with the frame structure developed in the novel.

1.5.2. Temporal Frame

Here we will investigate the various ways in which the author exposes us to a temporal sequence and how this sequence affects the mode of structuring the novel. *Time* will be primarily regarded as a "controlling" device, that which, together with the frame structure, regulates the flow of the story's development.

The main *temporal frame* of the novel is opened up by a chronological element—"Thirty years ago"—used in order to start two of its main chapters, Chapter I (on Marseilles prison) and Chapter VI (on the Marshalsea prison).

Another important aspect of the temporal frame is the interrelationship between *past* and *present*, and the consequent psychological dimension.⁸ This is expressed through Arthur, Mrs Clennam, Little Dorrit and her father, for these are the ones deeply affected by their "haunting" past and the way they deal with it. In *Arthur's* case, the past is tightly linked to the secret of his birth, to his miserable childhood and to the scars left by his long exile, and, consequently, to the dream-like state of mind he is sometimes found in and the psychological

⁸ Fielding emphasizes that *Little Dorrit* is "a novel of the past, of memory, and deeply concerned with how to treat a determined dwelling on past wrongs and seeking for past happiness," which explains the characters' relationship with time. (FIELDING, K.J. "Dickens and the Past: The Novelist of Memory." In *Experience in the Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968, p.123-124).

intensity with which his character is built. The psychological past and its effect on Arthur's character can be clearly perceived during his development in the story and the various phases he goes through in order to be freed from the burden of past memories and guilt. *Mrs Clennam*, in turn, is the physical and psychological embodiment of past memories, which are revealed in the words within the "double-cased watch—DO NOT FORGET!", an idea which haunts her throughout the novel, together with the insane, stern religiousness which delineates her personality. *Little Dorrit*, despite her extreme down-to-earth manner in the first part of the novel, becomes a "dreamer" in the second; however, it should not be considered a negative attitude for it expresses her immutability and the sense of loyalty to the values developed during her life in the Marshalsea prison. In her case, the past does not represent a haunting shadow; on the contrary, it only means the cherished possibility of returning to dear people and places. *Mr. Dorrit*, who is also deeply affected by past memories in a negative, self-destructive way, is marked by a paradox. In Book I, he wants to revive the days before imprisonment, when he was young and noble, something kept up through his affected behaviour in the prison. In Book II, the past means the Marshalsea days and it hangs over his head as a shameful taint, which explains his uncontrolled attempt to erase the past from his mind. Mr. Dorrit's enraged reaction towards Young John, the son of a turnkey, his avoidance of Arthur's relationship with them, behaviour which culminated at the dinner-party at Mrs Merdle's, are all effects of his fruitless attempt to forget. Here we reach a point in which the two extreme ideas linked to the past are highlighted for Mrs Clennam's aim is NOT TO FORGET, while Mr. Dorrit's is TO FORGET, no matter how. Little Dorrit is the only character capable of dealing with both sides of this dilemma since the past does not constitute a burden in her life. Another character who is totally immune to the shadow of past memories is Frederick Dorrit, as he seems to be oblivious of the cares of the

other members of the family (his brother's, Fanny's and Tip's) concerning the matter.

Within this temporal frame, the *flow of time* is also strictly marked. If we compare the two parts of the novel, Books I and II, we notice that the first is characterized by a *speedy* chronological sequence—a fact that makes us wonder at the reason for such a difference. We can say that such speed has to do with the fact that in Book I all the main elements in the novel (characters, setting, and so on) are introduced to us. However, we can also say that this speed is observed mainly from Chapter I to Chapter VII, and that these chapters also introduce Little Dorrit's history from her birth until she begins her “womanly life” (p.71), the point at which we find her in the novel and at which her relationship with Arthur begins. This strategy gives us not only the idea of “passing time” but also of the way Dickens manipulated his information in order to reach the point at which all the loose ends of the novel would start to be tied up.

Despite the speedy narrative, we notice that the chronological time is not straightforwardly marked by precise dates or time sequence and that Dickens is very clear in expressing it. In the first part of the novel, Dickens employs a steadier and more marked time flow, which is sometimes denoted by objective elements or more blurred ones. In Chapter I, *Cavalletto* is used in a precise, clock-like manner in order to inform us about the time he and Rigaud have been in prison. In Chapter II, time gains a new dimension, for we move to the “*quarantine* quarters” and characters are shown to be dependent on a “space/time alliance” in order to obtain their release. In Chapter III, the “maddening church *bells*” in London mark the time flow with their “dissonant” chant while summoning people to their religious obligation, and in Mrs Clennam's house the “Sabbath” (with its religious-like time connotation) becomes an impediment for a son who has been away from home for over twenty years. In this same house, “time” is clearly symbolized by a “double-

cased" *watch* and a heavy *clock* (although these are much more linked to a psychological time than a chronological one), and a *fire* in the grate "[which] had been burning for fifteen years" (p.33) also conveys the idea that time has stood still in that house. In Chapter IV, a burning *candle* shows Affery how long she had been asleep. In Chapter V, the *city clocks* announce the hour and Flintwinch brings up his *watch* from the depth of his clothes. In Chapter VI, we have Mr. Dorrit's *physical decay* through the *falling rings* of his "irresolute hands," and in Chapter VII the sense of Little Dorrit's *aging* also gives us the idea of this hurried time span within the novel.

After these chapters, as the novel reaches a point at which the main elements—plot, characters, point of view and action—are established and linked to one another, the flow of time becomes *slower* and is expressed mainly through the characters' actions, through their changing places, through the flow of night and day and through the changes of seasons. The function of this change in the flow of time can be related to the changes that occur in relation to the characters' experiences in the story, the "reversals" that occur in their destinies, and also the presentation of the story's *dénouement*.

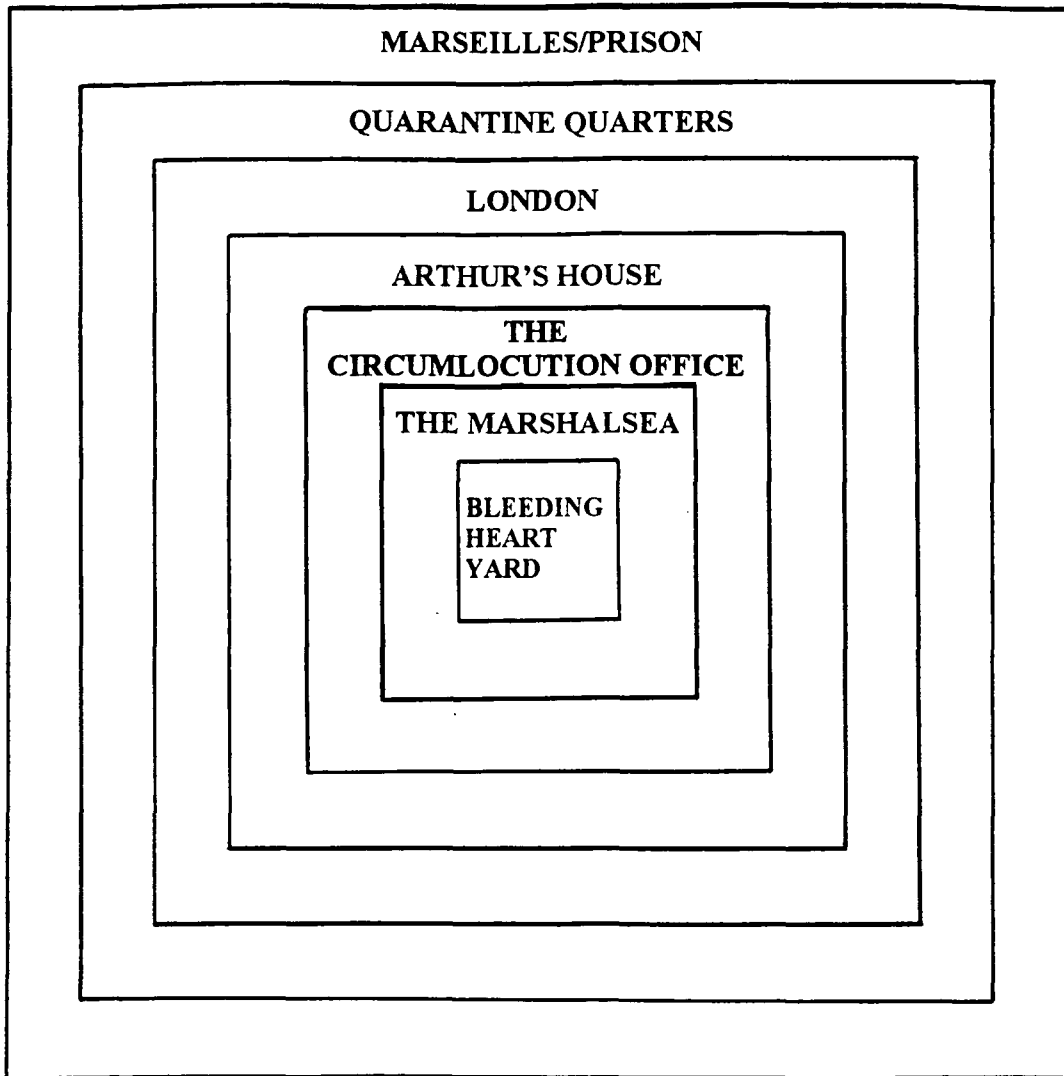
Given the chronotopical interrelationship within the frame structure of the novel, we can say that this interwoven pattern of time and space represents a decisive device as bracket and as organizing centre, in terms of controlling the action and the narrative. The characters' psychological and physical relationship with their surroundings is also emphasized through space and time which gives a new dimension of their function in the story.

The analysis also enabled us to demonstrate other "breaks" within the narrative. First, in terms of *space*, the framework of the novel suffers various forms of breaks. Second, in terms of *time*, the break of *the temporal frame* into "past" and "present" and that of *the time flow* into "speedy" and "slow" also

indicate the freedom characters experienced, for they were under no strict temporal control. Such breaks corroborate those already perceived in terms of structure, plot, characterization and point of view.

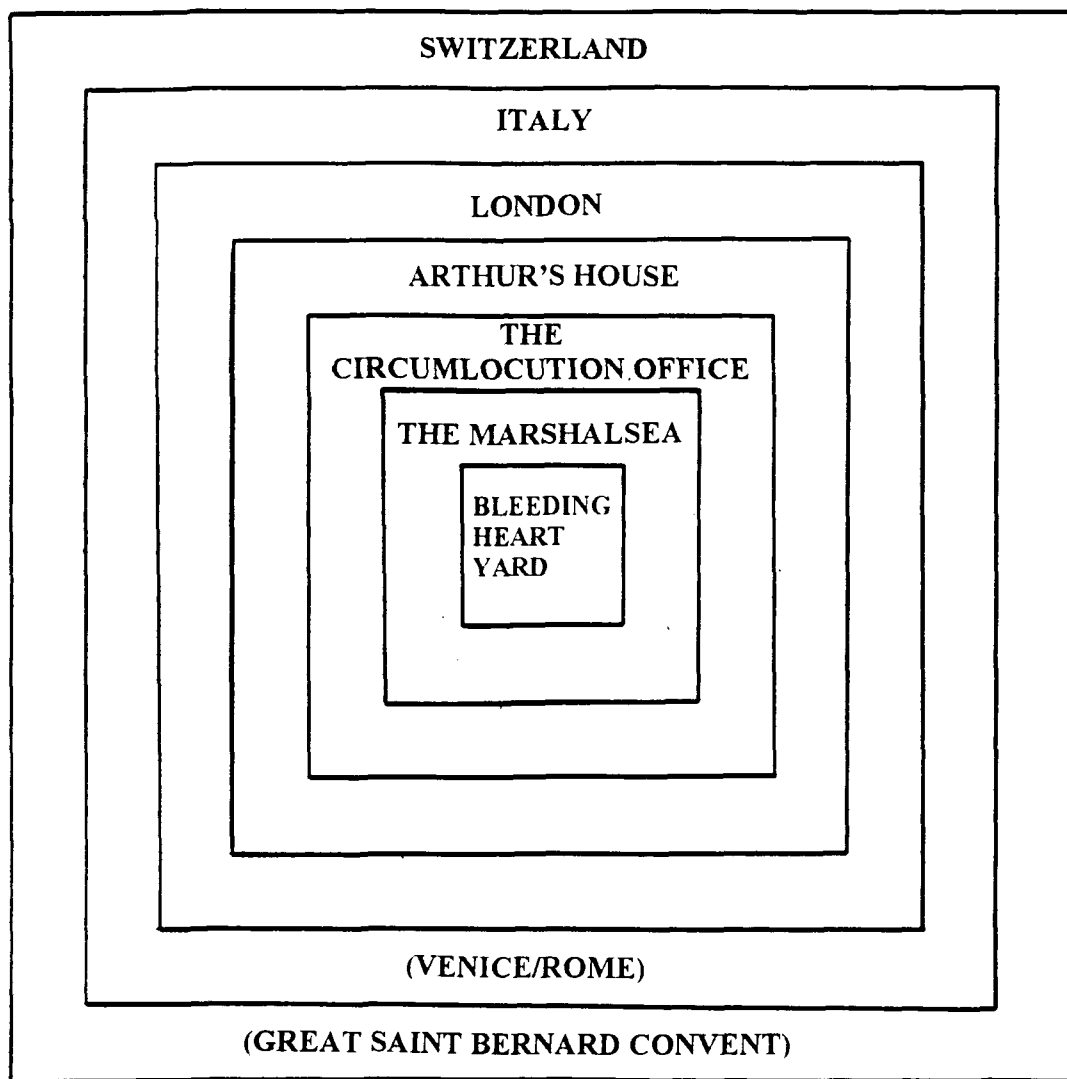
GRAPHIC XIX

Book I - Chronotopical Frame



GRAPHIC XX

Book II - Chronotopical Frame



1.6. The Organization of Social Interaction

‘Shaken out of destiny’s dice-box [...] into
your company, eh? By Heaven! So much
the better for you. You’ll profit by it.’

Rigaud Blandois¹

In this part, *action* and *interaction* will be mainly analysed according to the characters’ specific behaviour. We will emphasize not only what leads one character to be linked to another, and the consequences of such a link, but also how characters behave according to some situations and what is behind the pattern they help to weave with their distinct but unifying behaviour. This analysis will also help us to show how their behaviour reflects their inner traits and how it highlights their effectiveness and relationship to the reality established in the story.

In order to understand better the importance of the organization of social interaction in *Little Dorrit* it is fundamental to know Dickens’s opinion about the way he presented the characters. As he says, “it stricks me that it would be a new thing to show people coming together, in a chance way, as fellow-travellers, and being in the same place, ignorant of one another, as happens in life; and to connect them afterwards, and to make the waiting for that connection a part of the interest”.²

Dickens’s idea leads us to analyse his approach to the presentation of the characters and their action, as at the very beginning of the novel he refers twice, but in different tones, to the hidden workings that make people act and interact. The first reference is made through Miss Wade’s “evil” words to Mr.

¹ DICKENS, C. *Little Dorrit*, p.137.

² FORSTER, J. *The Life of Charles Dickens*. 2nd vol. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1966, p.182.

Meagles, at the Quarantine Quarters, which show us a very dark, gruesome idea of what life has in store for us in relation to our interaction with people:

‘In our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet *us*, from many strange places and by many strange roads [...] and what it is set to us to do to them, and what it is set to them to do to us, will all be done [...] you may be sure that there are men and women already on their road, who have their business to do with *you*, and who will do it. Of a certainty they will do it. They may be coming hundreds, thousands, of miles over the sea there; they may be close at hand now; they may be coming, for anything you know, or anything you can do to prevent it, from the vilest sweepings of this very town.’ (p.25)

Dickens seems to introduce this matter through Miss Wade, for her action and interaction is marked by mystery, by ominous thoughts and intentions, as she is the very expression of the darkest side of human nature. This is corroborated by the fact that “there was something in the manner of these words that [...] implied that what was to be done was necessarily evil” (p.25). The assertiveness and negative fatefulness implied by Miss Wade’s words seem to function as a foreshadowing element of the “strange” coincidences that will occur in the novel in terms of characters’ action and interaction.

The second reference is made by the narrator after presenting characters at the Quarantine Quarters:

[...] the hot night was on Marseilles; and through it the caravan of the morning, all dispersed, went their appointed ways. And thus ever, by day and night, under the sun and under the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another, move all we restless travellers through the pilgrimage of life. (p.27)

Here, the narrator’s words are more poetical and they denote positiveness in people’s action and interaction. People do not “come” to meet one another but they are “restless travellers” who “journey through the

pilgrimage of life". His account does not imply premeditated evildoing but just naturalness and simplicity in people's interaction.

The difference in tone given to these two passages—one so fiercely fatalistic and the other stressing the rewarding interaction that is an indispensable part of life—foreshadows the parallel forces that permeate the novel, that is, that of evil characters and that of the others who might or not fall into their trap or game.

These two ways of regarding "fate" or "destiny" give us the means to present characters in two distinct frames according to their action, for as Goffman points out,

whenever an individual participates in an episode of activity, a distinction will be drawn between what is called the person, individual, or player, namely, he who participates, and the particular role, capacity, or function he realizes during that participation. [...] In short, there will be a *person-role formula*. The nature of a particular frame will, of course, be linked to the nature of the person-role formula it sustains. One can never expect complete freedom between individual and role and never expect complete constraint. But no matter where on this continuum a particular formula is located, the formula itself will express the sense in which the framed activity is geared into the continuing world.³

This "person-role formula" helps us further to identify the role adopted by characters in the novel in a very defined way, for owing to their type of behaviour they can be *fabricators*⁴—those who create a deception or fabrication—or *victims*⁵—those who are contained in the deception. In this sense, we are led to the two main forces ruling the story as shown above.

In terms of social interaction, fabrications can be subdivided according to their function. Thus, we have: *benign fabrications*⁶—those which are claimed

³ GOFFMAN, p.269.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.83.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.83.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.87.

to be built in the interest of the person contained by them—and *exploitive fabrications*⁷—those which seek to fulfil some private interest through a malignant construction.

In order to suit the purpose of the analysis of characters' behaviour better, the terms "benign" and "exploitive" will be employed in relation to "fabricators". The frame of "exploitive fabricators" will be considered first since we want to emphasize how their evildoings control the development of the story.

Exploitive Fabricators

In this frame are included the novel's malignant characters: Rigaud, Jeremiah Flintwinch, Henry Gowan, the Patriarch, Miss Wade, Fanny, Tip, the Merdles and the Barnacles.

Rigaud Blandois Lagnier, the villain, is one of the main "fabricators" in the novel. Rigaud's exploitive fabrication is enhanced by the fact that he appears and disappears magically in the novel—hence the use of the "cloak". He even says that he is "of no country" (p.345), which reinforces this "supernatural" behaviour. Such a comparison can be understood if we follow some of his steps within the story. As mentioned before, he is introduced as "the man who lay on the ledge of the grating [and who] jerked his great cloak" (p.3) at the prison in Marseilles. After leaving the "villainous prison" we meet him at the Quarantine quarters, "a tall French gentleman with raven hair and beard, of a swart and terrible, not to say genteely diabolical aspect, but who had shown himself the mildest of men," (p.22) in the company of Miss Wade, Arthur, the Meagles and Tattycoram. After their departure we meet him again arriving at the Break of Day, "one man, slowly moving towards Chalon [...with a] cloak over his shoulder" (p.124), and now he re-encounters Cavalletto. After this, he

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.103.

appears at the Clennam's house, where he is acquainted with Mrs Clennam, Flintwinch and Affery: "The man was dressed like a traveller, in a foraging cap with fur about it, and a heap of a cloak. [He] looked like a foreigner" (p.344). In Book II Rigaud is further connected to the Dorrits, the Gowans, Miss Wade, Tattycoram and, later, to Arthur, until he completely disappears through death (p.793). These are some of the passages in which this "diabolical" figure appears and disappears.

Rigaud Blandois is a minor character who is everywhere. This gives an idea of all the frames of action he opens within the story, how he builds up a "secret monitoring," for Rigaud "maintains a position that can be discredited (and thus sustains a fabrication of some kind), [and] it is very likely that such a fabrication will be sooner or later discovered".⁸ This is how he manages to have access to the various groups of characters within the story. It is a strategy which works through "penetration," for Rigaud "[...] exploits legitimate (as opposed to clandestine) access"⁹ to Mrs Clennam's house, he "infiltrates" himself where Mrs Clennam and Jeremiah can be closely observed and charged with the secret. Blandois's action is also characterized by "entrapment," for he believes himself to be the "proper person with whom to share the secret world".¹⁰ First, he manages to be received in Mrs Clennam's house, and later reveals his real intention in relation to her. Such a variety of frames is in accordance with his role as a villain, the way he spreads his net in order to achieve the result he wants with his "blackmail". In other words, Rigaud, as a fabricator, entraps, or "contains," his victims through "marketable information,"¹¹ which is the main feature within his frame of action. Rigaud's "indirect fabrication"¹² is marked by

⁸ GOFFMAN, p.166.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.170.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.172.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.453-454.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.107.

the fact that he gets acquainted with all his “victims” before he puts his blackmail into action. Such behaviour denotes another frame in his action, that is, “tracking,” “an important structural feature of framed activities,”¹³ for he intentionally manipulates his victims as happens in his early visits to Mrs Clennam’s house, in his journey to Europe and his acquaintance with the Dorrits, which occurred in the period preceding his “final” action towards the revelation of the “secret”. The final stage of Rigaud’s exploitive frame is marked by “intimidation,”¹⁴ for apart from closing his net of acquaintances he also sends a note to Mrs Clennam urging her to arrange “a little proposition” (p.747) he had submitted to her: a proposition she would “unconditionally” accept or reject, “with its train of consequences”.

One of the hallmarks of Rigaud’s personality and action is his laughter: “When Monsieur Rigaud laughed, a change took place in his face, that was more remarkable than prepossessing. His moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache, in a very sinister and cruel manner” (p.5-6). That transformation of his face is one of the most strongly emphasized characteristics of his villainy. Within Rigaud’s frame of action, such a change represents a “facial frame, [for] the facial expression is capable of extremely rapid changes and extreme delicate shadings,”¹⁵ which causes a “frame break”. His “diabolical expression” disrupts the “activity” in which he is engaged, for other people’s perception of the activity is affected by it. Such volatile behaviour is especially perceived by Little Dorrit and Pet:

his manner had uniformly something in it, which they both knew to be different from his bearing towards others. The difference was too minute in its expression to be perceived by others, but they knew it to be there. A mere trick of his evil eyes, a mere turn of his smooth white hand, a mere hair’s-breadth of addition to the

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.413.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.104.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.349.

fall of his nose and the rise of his moustache in the most frequent movement of his face, conveyed to both of them equally a swagger personal to themselves. It was as if he said, 'I have a secret power in this quarter. I know what I know.' (p.509)

Rigaud's self-assertion is also highlighted. In prison with Cavalletto, Rigaud is the "Lucky bird" of the chamber as he receives the best food. "He [also] had a certain air of being a handsome man, a well-bred man" [and in all his glory, Rigaud considers himself] a citizen of the world, [owning] no particular country, a cosmopolitan gentleman, [and who is] respected as a gentleman universally" (p.9). This represents another frame regarding his behaviour, for Rigaud pretended to be what he was not, which is an essential part of his game-behaviour. Through his "gentlemanly" behaviour and manner Rigaud would mislead, or "contain," others in his scheme of deception, an attitude that is also corroborated by his "theatrical" behaviour, which can be perceived when he "rehearses" to Cavalletto a speech which could perfectly be directed to those who would judge him in prison (p.9). Goffman consider "rehearsals" as "planned [courses] of action"¹⁶ which are in accordance with Rigaud's strategically manufactured behaviour. Apart from that, he also uses "demonstration" while rehearsing to Cavalletto, as demonstration implies "performances of a tasklike activity out of its usual functional context in order to allow someone who is not the performer to obtain a close picture of the doing of the activity".¹⁷ Therefore, when "talking"¹⁸ he seems to be "rehearsing" a speech. His "game" is to be a gentleman and he plays "it out wherever he goes" (p.9). He is the villain, the master, the one who cannot stand being "caged like a bird; [he is] proud [and] can't submit, [he] must govern" (p.10). Rigaud also has a unique way of describing his character as he always emphasizes that "it is [his]

¹⁶ GOFFMAN, p.60.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.66.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.496.

character” to govern, to be sensitive and brave, to be impatient and that “frankness” is also “part of his character” (p.11). Rigaud’s expressive self-assertion is found in his words in Mrs Clennam’s house, when he says: “I have a partiality for everything genuine. Such as I am, I am genuine myself” (p.355), which is followed by another outburst of assertiveness as Rigaud (Blandois) says to Flintwinch: “It’s part of my character. I am sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative. A sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative man, Mr. Flintwinch, must be that, or nothing!” (p.357) Rigaud’s attitude here expresses “the concealment channel” which is typical of exploitive fabrications, that is, such fabrications “rely on the capacity of some of the participants in a setting to act (and communicate) in a manner not perceptible to some of the others”.¹⁹ The way Blandois produced his words opened up a frame of “ambiguity”²⁰ in that context, for “there was an inkling of suspicion in Mr. Flintwinch’s face that might be nothing, as he swaggered out of his chair” (p.357) after Blandois had almost finished his conversation with Mrs Clennam and him. This sudden suspicion is created as Flintwinch has “doubts” about the “real” intention behind Blandois’s words and behaviour. However, Blandois’ genuineness is distrusted by Gowan’s dog (p.493-494); his devilish, animal-like nature does not miss the dog’s perception, however, which leads Blandois to kill it (p. 510). His attitude here is explained by him personally when he describes his character to Mrs Clennam: “I am a gentleman of the softest and sweetest disposition, but who, if trifled with, becomes enraged. Noble natures under such circumstances become enraged. I possess a noble nature. When the lion is awakened—that is to say, when I enrage—the satisfaction of my animosity is as acceptable to me as money” (p.768).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.216.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.305.

Blandois' artful and playful talk is also seen when, while talking to Flintwinch, he "indirectly" refers to himself without Flintwinch's noticing it. He says:

'I had a friend once, my good comrade Flintwinch,' said Blandois, [...] 'I had a friend once, who had heard so much of the dark side of this city and its ways, that he wouldn't have confided himself alone by night with two people who had an interest in getting him under the ground—my faith! not even in a respectable house like this—unless he was bodily too strong for them. Bah! What a poltroon, my Flintwinch! Eh? [...] But he wouldn't have done it, my Flintwinch, unless he had known them to have the will to silence him, without the power. He wouldn't have drunk from a glass of water, under such circumstances—not even in a respectable house like this, my Flintwinch—unless he had seen one of them drink first, and swallow too!' (p.548-549)

Blandois' personality becomes even more sinister when we know about his past life and his wife's mysterious death. He is a man whose fate was "shaken out of destiny's dice-box" (p.9) and the same "fate" makes him encounter those who become part of his "game" and villainy. His hideous, changeable behaviour becomes apparent in his masterful attitude towards Cavalletto, in prison; his subdued, gentlemanly behaviour at the Quarantine quarters and in Europe, and his subservient attitude at the Clennams' house. These are the various facets of his behaviour and the way he manipulates his victims.

By following Rigaud Blandois' characteristics and observing his action and interaction with other characters we see the importance of his role not only as representing the darker and evil side of society but also as the pivot for the unravelling of the secret kept in Mrs Clennam's house.

This last of his main functions within the novel explains why Blandois links himself to the main clusters of characters, that is, the Clennams, the Dorrits and the Gowans, pursuing acquaintance with those who can provide him with some means for him to close his net around Mrs Clennam. Although

Blandois is dropped off by Dickens as soon as he becomes unnecessary to the story, it seems that we can only do this character justice if we see him not only as the unscrupulous villain, the devilish blackmailer, but as the agent of Mrs Clennam's release from her psychological imprisonment as well as Arthur's physical and, also, psychological one. Thus Blandois is unconsciously playing a twofold role—on the one hand he is the “exploitive fabricator” who seeks revenge on Society by profiting on someone else's account, and on the other hand he is the one who, unknowingly, loses his “game” to someone neatly trapped by him. Then occurs here a “frame reversal,”²¹ which means that, the “professional entrapper” becomes contained in and vulnerable to his own fabrication, which leads him to total failure.

Jeremiah Flintwinch, the servant-partner, is used as much as an accomplice as a clever artifice in Mrs Clennam's doings, for she is not alone in her fantasized, “fabricated” world. Here we have Jeremiah's frame of action, for that “keen-eyed” old man has much to accomplish in his own fabrications also, as he quietly succeeds in becoming Mrs Clennam's partner without having to “stand between Arthur and his mother” any longer. Jeremiah, in a disguised, subdued way, can even control Mrs Clennam's actions in relation to Arthur's past life. By handing the box containing old papers about Arthur's past to his twin brother (p.42) he establishes a veiled controlling hand over the Clennams, as is seen later on in the novel through Blandois's blackmail. Jeremiah's behaviour towards the secret changes the rule and the course of the game without Mrs Clennam's knowing it, which creates “manufacture of negative experience,” for “nothing happens; no basic relationships are disturbed. However, it is apparent that those presumably not in charge of the activity can intentionally attempt to create negative experiences for those in presumed

²¹ GOFFMAN, p.177.

control”.²² This means to say that one of the participants in the fabrication (Jeremiah) breaks the frame of the game established by both “players,” and consequently the way it develops. This also creates “vulnerability of experience”²³ in relation to her frame of action, for the consequence of this “betrayal,” Jeremiah’s “fatal error” (p.778), is Rigaud’s possession of the “secret” and his blackmail, which is used to break the cycle created by Mrs Clennam’s mystery.

Apart from being a kind of “deceiver” in relation to Mrs Clennam, Flintwinch also plays the role of a fabricator in relation to Affery, for he deceives her about her dreams, “her old tricks” (p.629), about real situations which she is supposed to be dreaming about. One way in which Jeremiah perpetuates his mastery over her is by promising her “such a dose” if she does not stop her “silly” behaviour.

Henry Gowan, the fake artist, Pet’s husband, has a fabricated behaviour which is hinted at in different ways which completing one another, as it first appears as “a passing cloud on Mr. Meagles’s good-humoured face [and] the touch of uneasiness on Mrs Meagles” (p.203), then, when Daniel Doyce gives his impression of the gentleman to Arthur: “I see him bringing present anxiety, and I fear, future sorrow, into my old friend’s house. I see him wearing deeper lines into my old friend’s face, the nearer he draws to, and the oftener he looks at, the face of his daughter. In short, I see him with a *net* about the pretty and affectionate creature whom he will never make happy” (p.307-308).

In spite of Gowan’s deceitful behaviour he can not avoid the frame of “suspicion” created by it, for the Meagles and Doyce are aware of the threat he represents to Pet’s life. Therefore, his “fabrication” is not sufficient to cover his plans.

²² GOFFMAN, p.423.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.463.

This skilfully arranged “net” is further perceived through Gowan’s words to Arthur one week before his wedding to Pet, that is, when he confesses that he is “a disappointed man [for he belongs] to a clan, or a clique, or a family, or a connection, or whatever you like to call it, that might have provided for [him] in any one of fifty ways, and that took it into its head not to do it at all. So here [he is], a poor devil of an artist” (p.401) who is ready to marry not only “a beautiful and charming girl” (p.401) but someone as rich and “petted” as Pet. However, Gowan’s “real form” is fully apprehended in Book II, “Riches,” when the couple join other “fellow-travellers” on their journey through Europe. Here we have Gowan described as being “a little impatient [and as having a] sarcastic temper” (p.437), which is in accord with his behaviour when he is first seen by Arthur at the ferry-boat:

there was something in his way of spurning [stones] out of their places with his heel, and getting them into the required position, that [showed] an air of cruelty in it. Most of us have more or less frequently derived a similar impression, from a man’s manner of doing some very little thing: plucking a flower, clearing away an obstacle, or even destroying an insentient object. (p.201)

Gowan’s behaviour is completely different from that shown minutes later at the Meagles’ cottage where his “manner was easy, and the voice agreeable” (p.202). In this passage we perceive Gowan’s change in behaviour and the way he builds the frame of action in order to deceive the Meagles. His “exploitive fabrication” follows the same steps perceived in that of Blandois, for he first approaches the family (penetration), obtains what he wants, and then shows his “real” intentions. Gowan’s “cruelty” in relation to Pet can be observed on several occasions, in the way he regards her as “the wife of a man who had made a descent in marrying her, but whose chivalrous love for her had cancelled that inequality” (p.489). However, the most revealing way of expressing it is his attachment and friendship with Rigaud, which explains why we can compare

them. This attachment can be understood better if we consider Dickens's own ideas about Gowan's character, for he wrote on 30 January 1856 that "the Circumlocution heroes led to the Society scenes, the Hampton Court dowager-sketches, and Mr. Gowan; all parts of one satire levelled against prevailing political and social vices [...] Society, the Circumlocution Office, and Mr. Gowan, are of course three parts of one idea and design".²⁴

This clarifies the attitude of this "ill-conditioned man," of the dowry-hunter and his effort to become "established" in Society no matter what price others have to pay for it. Such behaviour is corroborated by what happens at the end of the novel:

By this time Mr. Henry Gowan had made up his mind that it would be agreeable to him not to know the Meagleses. He was so considerate as to lay no injunctions on his wife in that particular; but, he mentioned to Mr. Meagles that personally they did not appear to him to get on together, and that he thought it would be a good thing if—politely, and without any scene, or anything of that sort—they agreed they were the best fellows in the world, but were best apart. (p.806)

Mr. Christopher Casby, the stingy Patriarch, the head of an idiosyncratic clan, also has very paradoxical behaviour. Dickens seems to be building "forgeries," "fabricators" who deceive Society in a very "benevolent" way. The Patriarch's action is totally directed towards the lowest level of Society—he is the landlord of Bleeding Heart Yard and has the Bleeding Hearts as his most "squeezed" tenants. His stingy personality is first hinted at when on hearing Arthur's saying that he had come "to pay [his] respects [the Patriarch] seemed a feather's weight disappointed by the last words, having perhaps prepared himself for the visitor's wishing to pay *something else*" (p.146, my italics). Therefore, this "something else" is the leading idea of that "head". This patriarchal mind is anything but "patriarchal" and "benevolent," as proved by

²⁴ FORSTER, p.183.

the story. The Patriarch's stingy behaviour can be compared to that of Mr. Merdle, the great Merdle, who, silently and magnanimously, "squeezes" society of its goods while people are totally taken in by his behaviour. The Patriarch, then, on a different, lower level, does the same dirty job, for he also deceives people with his appearance as much as Mr. Merdle.

Miss Wade is the manipulative self-tormentor. To our astonishment, we also find that Miss Wade, apart from being connected to Blandois (something quite reasonable and understandable, considering the nature of their personalities and "fabrications") is, curiously and unexpectedly, linked to the Patriarch, a connection that adds even more mystery to the already "shadowy" life led by this woman. Pancks, in his mysterious way, tells Arthur that Miss Wade is a woman who "[writhes] under her life [...and that someone] more angry, passionate, reckless, and revengeful never lived" (p.541),—an account that neatly summarizes her character. In order to scrutinize Miss Wade's almost destructive power and "fabrication" we need to go further into this character and observe, as Arthur did, the inner, hidden traits which helped to form her "oppressed and repressed" behaviour. If we consider "The History of a Self Tormentor" (p.663), this disturbing first-person account unexpectedly written and handed to Arthur, we find all the possible clues for Miss Wade's "shadowy" personality and behaviour: the way her righteous sense of the "misfortune of not being a fool" shows how deeply she has fooled herself and others throughout her life. Moreover, her orphaned childhood, her homosexual tendencies and, especially, her link with Mr. Gowan and her hatred of Pet, are mere responses of a disturbed, selfish mind. Miss Wade represents, in the same way as Tattycoram, a character who stays on the boundary of the transition between good and bad, for she is given the chance of changing sides but her nature does not allow it. In sum, in the same way that her evil partner, Rigaud, physically

dies, she also dies through her unsuccessful attempt to control Tattycoram and by possibly falling into forgetfulness.

Fanny, according to her uncle Frederick is a “false girl” (p.485), for her hypocrisy, selfishness and ambition for status and position in “Society” makes her one of the cruellest characters in relation to Little Dorrit’s lack of pride. Fanny is the one who, with “offended dignity,” would call Little Dorrit “common-minded little Amy. [...] complete prison-child [...] prevaricating little piece of goods” (p.368-369), who would intentionally depreciate the family with her good behaviour, and who stressed that their “characters and point of view are sufficiently different” (p.589). Fanny is another character whose cunning “exploitive fabrications” are built in order to fulfil her “social” ambition. Fanny’s frame of behaviour not only contains her family but also succeeds in containing Mrs Merdle, her unbeatable enemy and rival. Fanny also serves as Little Dorrit’s antithesis, her behaviour always being strategically worked out, as seen in Book II when Sparkler and his mother are totally taken in by her project of marrying into Society. Fanny, like her father, employs a “theatrical” way of avoiding problems—she assumes a “fuguelike” attitude by wishing herself dead every time she is in trouble or when she can not stand a situation. This is an instance of “feigned incapacity,” that is, what Goffman calls “hysterical illness” which the individual employs in order to delude “himself about his malfunctioning, even in the face of skeptical witnesses or, of course, no witness at all. [...through] hysterical reactions [...] one is given support for the notion of the individual being able to con himself”.²⁵ However, Fanny is one of the characters who suffer a “frame reversal” in life after Mr. Merdle’s suicide, and has to depend on the help her sister and Arthur can give her and her family.

Edward Dorrit, Tip, *the idle brother*, is the other one who feeds Fanny’s pretence and the family’s false behaviour. Tip is

²⁵ GOFFMAN, p.192.

that gallant brother [while Fanny is the] dainty sister, so steeped in mean experiences, and so loftly conscious of the family name; so ready to beg or borrow from the poorest, to eat of anybody's bread, spend anybody's money, drink from anybody's cup and break it afterwards. To have painted the sordid facts of their lives, and they throughout invoking the death's head apparition of the family gentility to come and scare their benefactors, would have made Young John a satirist of the first water. (p.232)

Tip's behaviour does not impress us apart from the few moments in which he feels outraged if someone denies him "material" help, as in Arthur's case. Tip is someone whose life is to fall to misfortune and to seek to take advantage of those who can provide him with some means in order to continue his idle life. If compared to both his sisters, he is a feeble, dependent young fellow who tries to pretend that life is as easy as the act of going in and out of prison without really paying attention to what is inside it. In his small world Tip is also a "weak" type of "exploitive fabricator"—he tries, without success, to involve people in his "financial" projects. However, he is the type who falls into his own traps and ends up locked in prison. Tip's behaviour clearly shows us the type of character he is and how he managed to keep himself far from the reality his family lived.

However, one solid point in the looseness of Tip's character,

was, that he respected and admired his sister Amy. The feeling had never induced him to spare her a moment's uneasiness, or to put himself to any restraint or inconvenience on her account; but with that Marshalsea taint upon his love, he loved her. The same rank Marshalsea flavour was to be recognised in his distinctly perceiving that she sacrificed her life to her father, and his having no idea that she had done anything for himself. (p.232)

His relationship with Little Dorrit is marked by two opposite feelings, on the one hand there is deep love and admiration, and on the other there is utter oblivion and lack of awareness about the role she performs in relation to him.

The Merdles—Mrs Merdle (the parrot) and Mr. Merdle—form a couple of exploitive fabricators: *Mrs Merdle, the Bosom*, first appears during a meeting with Fanny and Little Dorrit and, here, we have a very good idea of this woman's carefully planned behaviour within a frame of pretence. At this meeting, (p.238) all she said was expressed in a way "as coldly as a woman of snow; quite forgetting the sisters except at odd times, and apparently addressing some abstraction of Society. For whose behoof, too, she occasionally arranged her dress, or the composition of her figure upon the ottoman" (p.240). This is a type of "suppressible diversion,"²⁶ a "comfort action," which is done in order to minimize responsibility from a determined activity, something recurrent in Mrs Merdle's action. Mrs Merdle, who, in Fanny's opinion, was "as false and insolent as a woman can be" (p.243), is a lady whose "action was usually with her left hand because her hands were not a pair; the left being much the whiter and plumper of the two" (p.238). They were "heavily ringed" hands which would be "passed over one another" in her observant way, or would be used to "[trace] the outline of her left eyebrow, and put it right" (p.240). She was a woman who "represented and expressed Society" (p.391). However, Mrs Merdle's behaviour during this meeting is "observed" and emphasized by a very curious companion:

in [the] spacious semicircular drawing-room [where the meeting took place] there was a parrot on the outside of a golden cage holding on by its beak with its scaly legs in the air, and putting itself into many strange upside-down postures. This peculiarity has been observed in birds of quite another feather, climbing golden wires. (p.238)

The *parrot*,²⁷ being near the "nest of crimson and gold cushions, [...] an ottoman" where Mrs Merdle is "voluptuously composed," interrupted her

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.542.

²⁷ Within "the frame analysis of talk" there are some types of figures and one of them is "natural figures,"—animal or human, which "while speaking, will naturally be speaking in a particular capacity, that is,

conversation, at times, with the “most piercing shrieks [...] as if its name were Society and it asserted its right to its exactions [...] [Later, it] shrieked another shriek; and it filled up the sentence so expressively that Mrs Merdle was under no necessity to end it” (p.239). The parrot’s accurate “timing” is related to the connectives used in this type of “interaction,” namely, “direction finding through hearing, perception of lip movements and their synchronization with what is spoken”.²⁸ In this sense, the parrot functions as a “breaking device” in Mrs Merdle’s frame behaviour, for it interrupts and ridicules her speech and manner at precise moments. Also, after Mrs Merdle had said that “Society suppresses us and dominates us [...] the parrot [broke] into a violent fit of laughter, after twisting divers bars of his cage with his crooked bill, and licking them with his black tongue” (p.240). Moreover, when the group was saying farewell, “they all stood near the cage of the parrot, as he tore at a claw-full of biscuit and spat it out, seemed to mock them with a pompous dance of his body without moving his feet, and suddenly turned himself upside down and trailed himself all over the outside of his golden cage, with the aid of his cruel beak and his black tongue” (p.242).

The bird, which has already been said to represent Society,²⁹ seems to be, here, a mocking and outrageous being, which perceives not only Mrs Merdle and Fanny’s hypocrisy but also the ridiculous interplay in which these two women are engaged. It seems that the bird stands for a kind of “king’s fool,” who perceives and mocks the hidden meanings behind everybody’s behaviour without being really understood in his absurd action. The bird can also be compared to an “observer” “watching [Mrs Merdle] with his head on one side, as if it took her for another splendid parrot of a larger species” (p.390), to “a

playing a particular role. But in spite of this, each such speaker sustains a single personal, that is, biographical identity, typically visibly so” (GOFFMAN, p.524).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.525.

²⁹ IRELAND, p.145.

Judge [...] presiding over [a] conference” (p.391); or he could seem to be putting on a show, for in one of his performances he stood “on one leg [...] burst into a fit of laughter, bobbed himself derisively up and down on both legs, and finished by standing on one leg again, and pausing for a reply, with his head as much awry as he could possibly twist it” (p.392). Throughout the parrot’s “interaction” with Mrs Merdle, she answered his remarks as if he could understand what was said, she would say: “—Bird, be quiet!” (p.242), an act which is described by Goffman as an “expression speech,” that is, “a very special kind of “communication” which adults engage with animals”.³⁰

The “Bosom,” however, has another function in the story apart from being “a Priestess of Society” (p.394). The Bosom is *Mr. Merdle’s* wife, and therefore it

was not a bosom to repose upon, but it was a capital bosom to hang jewels upon [for the Bosom’s husband] wanted something to hang jewels upon, and he bought it for the purpose [...] Like all his other speculations, it was sound and successful. The jewels showed to the richest advantage. The bosom moving in Society with the jewels displayed upon it, attracted general admiration. (p.247)

One element that might disturb us in this quote is the fact that the Bosom was literally “bought” for her second function in the story. This may be the essence of what linked the “magnanimous” couple, for they not only moved in and impressed Society, but they also seemed to be linked by a mutual need to plot against this same Society. As Mr. Merdle said to his wife, “You supply manner, and I supply money” (p.396).

In relation to *Mr. Merdle, the magnanimous forger*, it is important to know what led Dickens to create such a “wonder”. In his own words:

“I had the general idea,” he wrote while engaged on the sixth number, “of the Society business before the Sadleir affair, but I

³⁰ GOFFMAN, p.527.

shaped Mr. Merdle himself out of that precious rascality [...] Mr. Merdle's complaint, which you will find in the end to be fraud and forgery, came into my mind as the last drop in the silver cream-jug on Hampstead Heath".³¹

In this way, we come to another "exploitive fabricator" within the story, the one who was considered "the eighth wonder of the world" (p.600), "the master-mind of the age" (p.700), a man who was envied and flattered for his position in Society. Mr. Merdle's fabrication differs from those mentioned above as it "contained" the whole Society, something which caused a catastrophic effect after it was finished.

His character was considered astonishing in the public eye, for "there never was, there never had been, there never again should be, such a man as Mr. Merdle. Nobody [...] knew what he had done; but everybody knew him to be the greatest that had appeared" (p.571). Society's behaviour towards Mr. Merdle embodies "vulnerability of frame,"³² for it was vulnerable to all the misframings created by Mr. Merdle's ostensible behaviour. However, the magnanimous Mr. Merdle had a very awkward way of behaving, for he always seemed to be "taking himself into custody under both coat-sleeves" (p.700). He is therefore another character to employ a "comfort action," although nobody ever notices the hidden meaning in it. This habit is only fully understood after Mr. Merdle's suicide, for here we come to know that

he had sprung from nothing, by no natural growth or process that any one could account for; he had been, after all, a low, ignorant fellow; he had been a down-looking man, and no one had ever been able to catch his eye; he had been taken up by all sorts of people, in quite an unaccountable manner; he had never had any money of his own, his ventures had been utterly reckless, and his expenditure had been most enormous. (p.709-710)

³¹ FORSTER, p.183.

³² GOFFMAN, p.457.

In sum, his only attachment was related to “Forgery and Robbery” (p.710). His “insolvency” meant the downfall of Society’s uncountable victims, and after that he just became “a mighty scoundrel [...] simply the greatest Forger and the greatest Thief that ever cheated the gallows” (p.710). The only character who seemed to fully grasp the extent of Mr. Merdle’s forgery was the Chief Butler, for he was “the Avenging Spirit of this great man’s life, [who] relaxed nothing of his severity” (p.557). Together with the Merdles, then, we have those characters, the legion of Bars, Bishops, and fellow companions, whose only role was to move within Society reassuring “the fatal mania” (p.712) which promoted Mr. Merdle’s grandeur and hideous behaviour. Theirs was a “Society [which was] perhaps a little mercenary,” (p.392) for its only interest was to keep up with appearance and hypocrisy. The same Society was responsible for keeping the Circumlocution Office “not doing it,” and the inmates of the Marshalsea prison and the Bleeding Hearts within the boundaries of their outrageous condition.

The Barnacles are characters who also cling to the Circumlocution Office. *Barnacle Junior*’s behaviour serves to corroborate and continue that idealised by his ancestors and by those who believe in the supremacy of the public office and in its role as the “guardian” of society’s interest. *Mr. Tite Barnacle*’s superior role in the ingrained “circularity” of the Circumlocution Office is mirrored in the magnitude of his controlling “action” towards society. He represents the oppressive mind behind the undisturbed mechanisms of that Office.

In order to better understand the significance of this frame of characters we should consider the way Dickens develops the theme of the “Circumlocution Office,” for it is based on “allegory”³³—it challenges the reader to recognize the deeper meaning in the author’s construction. In the case of the

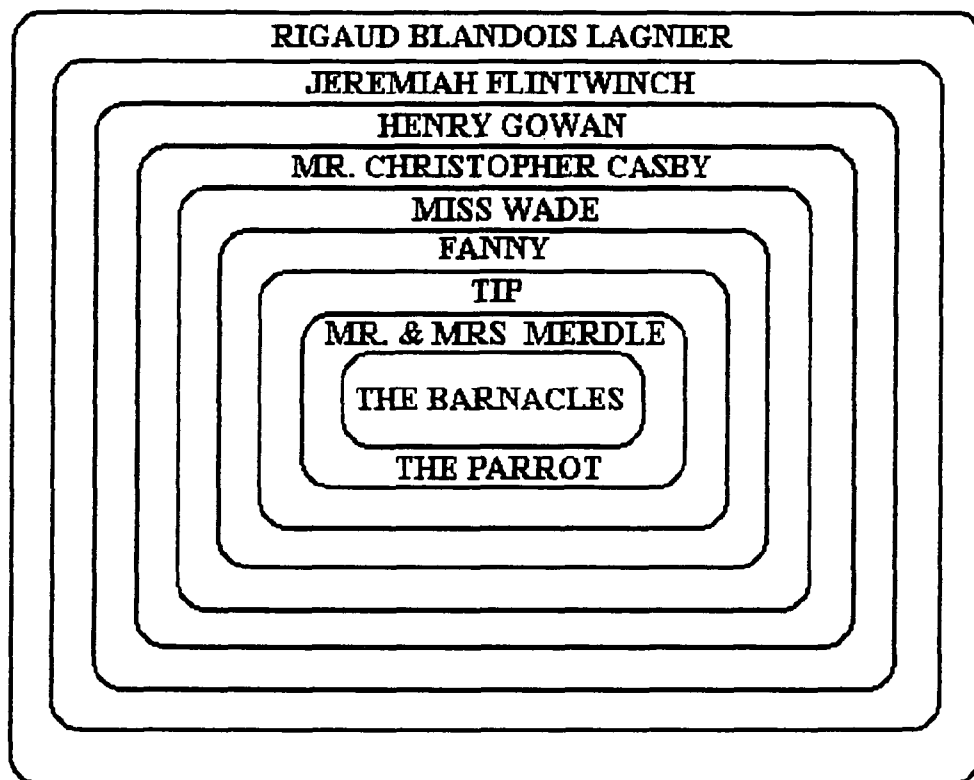
³³ HUTCHINSON, p.54.

Circumlocution Office this allegorical characteristic lies in the political and social criticism implied in its description. Dickens satirizes the “circumlocution” inherent to the Civil Service and bitterly denounces its controlling effect on the individual. The intentional effect created through this allegory is further reinforced by the crude characterization of the exploitive fabricators who rule that Office, the Merdles and the Barnacles.

The frames formed by these exploitive fabricators can be visualized in Graphic XXI below:

GRAPHIC XXI

EXPLOITIVE FABRICATORS



Benign Fabricators

Mrs Clennam and Mr. Dorrit are considered the only “benign fabricators” owing to the fact that they believe they are “protecting” and not deceiving their children through their fabrication. Goffman calls this “paternal construction”.³⁴

Mrs Clennam, the stern step-mother, someone who led her life “sternly, fiercely, wrathfully—praying that her enemies (she made them by her tone and manner expressly hers) might be put to the edge of the sword, consumed by the fire, smitten by plagues and leprosy, that their bones might be ground to dust, and that they might be utterly exterminated” (p.35). This, then, is Mrs Clennam, guided and ruled by her Calvinist faith, who has “set herself against evil; not against good [...who has] been an instrument of severity against sin” (p.792). Mrs Clennam’s fabrication starts in the past, at the moment she urges Arthur’s mother to give him to her. This is the starting point of the frame established by the “secret,” by her intention to be thought to be Arthur’s real mother and to cover the shame imposed on her by his father’s behaviour. Therefore, within her frame of action, Mrs Clennam also creates “vulnerability of experience” for she creates a “deception” in relation to the past. Here then occurs “error in framing,”³⁵ for Mrs Clennam based her action on wrong beliefs: she “misframed” events. In this sense, she controls the interpretation of a framed event, that is, Arthur’s birth. However, there is a crucial fact about the secret, as Arthur remains “contained” in it until the end of the novel. Thus, the fabrication is ended but the main individual to suffer its effects does not free himself from the “burden” caused by ignorance.

It is clear that Mrs Clennam not only represents “stern” religiousness and cruelty, but also the misleading and repressive unconscious ideal that ruled

³⁴ GOFFMAN, p.99.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.308.

English life during the Victorian period. Her mournful attitude is very much related to religious and moral concepts Dickens criticized, those ingrained ideas which withered the individual's mind and soul. This can be reinforced if we analyze her account of her up-bringing:

‘You do not know what it is [...] to be brought up strictly and straitly. I was so brought up. Mine was no light youth of sinful gaiety and pleasure. Mine were days of wholesome repression, punishment, and fear. The corruption of our hearts, the evil of our ways, the curse that is upon us, the terrors that surround us—these were the themes of my childhood. They formed my character, and filled me with an abhorrence of evil-doers. (p.774)

The fact that she imprisoned and exiled herself in her chamber can be related both to her self-inflicted punishment, for she carried the burden of her religious belief, and to the imprisonment which is extended to the whole society of that time, for the Victorians were subject to strict moral and social rules.

Although Mrs Clennam is the fabricator within the frame containing Arthur and the Dorrits, in relation to Blandois' frame of action (or fabrication) she becomes the dupe, the deceived one. This role reversal indicates “recontainment,”³⁶ that is, Mrs Clennam, who is a “fabricator” and “contains” various people in her “fabrication,” herself becomes “contained” in Blandois' “exploitive fabrication”. The fact that Mrs Clennam was cunningly involved in Blandois' net shows her vulnerability because of the secret created by herself, and, also because of the fragile world (the frame) she created around herself. This vulnerability entailed her involvement in Blandois' fabrication, his blackmail. Just like the old house, Mrs Clennam's psychological and moral drama was supporting itself on imaginary “gigantic crutches,” that crumbled down the moment her fantasy about the past was destroyed; hence her “physical” attempt to avoid Arthur's knowledge of the nature of the secret. This

³⁶ GOFFMAN, p.172.

sudden change in behaviour was clearly provoked by the “threat” that the disclosure of her secret represented to her moral beliefs.

William Dorrit, the Father of the Marshalsea, who “grew to be proud of the title” (p.65), was a “vain” man, someone whose misfortune became a mere detail if compared to the position he occupied in the prison. Mr. Dorrit can be said to be playing the same game as Blandois, that is, being superior to what he really is: a man of delicate countenance, someone who is prone to be disappointed with or resent any trace of injustice to his honourable figure. Here we find a frame of action which is maintained through pretence and self-delusion, for both figures try to be “gentlemen” despite their position within society. Moreover, William is the opposite of his brother Frederick, whom he “condescended towards [as being] an amiable, well-meaning man; a private character who had not arrived at distinction” (p.82). Through the “testimonials” (p.83) people were obliged to pay him at the prison, Mr. Dorrit also kept up the image of an admired and important figure despite his ignorance of Little Dorrit’s efforts to keep him fed and clothed, to Fanny’s working as a dancer to support herself and to Tip’s involuntary stay as an inmate at the Marshalsea prison owing to dubious enterprises.

Mr. Dorrit’s behaviour, then, juxtaposes two different types of fabrication. One is marked by his attempt to control and master the inmates of the prison and the other obliges him to be a victim of his pride, which prevents him from recognizing his children’s effort to survive without his help. Mr. Dorrit, despite his struggle to forget his life at the Marshalsea after receiving his fortune, is also marked by an extremely vulnerable character as we see through his “daydreaming” (p.636) and at Mrs Merdle’s dinner-party; when the whole burden of the past comes in the form of “an unexpected after-dinner speech” (p.646). His action here can be referred to as a “primary framework,” more

precisely “muffing,”³⁷ for he loses control of his actions without being able to reconstruct the frame behaviour he tried to impose on others.

One of the main features in Mr. Dorrit’s behaviour is the combination of his “flickering hands,” which is a gesture—a “comfort action”—with his speech, which is marked by a series of “hum’s and ha’s.” This constitutes “the management of excuses and apologies,”³⁸ unnoticed instances in which the individual “breaks free” from the role he is performing. According to Goffman, “these very small acts celebrate very large issues”.³⁹ When Mr. Dorrit refers to the years the family lived in the Marshalsea, he says: “I was there all those years. I was—ha—universally acknowledged as the head of the place. I—hum—I caused you to be respected there Amy. I—ha hum—I gave my family a position there” (p.479). These two features are the sole expression of this man’s vulnerability in relation to life,⁴⁰ which is also expressed through his dependence on his youngest child. Mr. Dorrit’s behaviour, though, can be further understood if compared to that of his brother Frederick.

Graphic XXII shows the frames formed by these two fabricators:

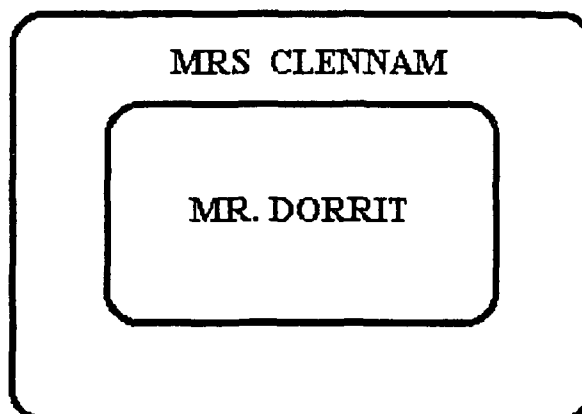
³⁷ GOFFMAN, p.31-32.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.542.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.542.

⁴⁰ Barickman also emphasizes that, “taken together [,] the characters of any Dickens' novel overwhelmingly assert in the smallest tics of speech or gesture as well as the most grandiose or violent acts that the self is on the defensive. The basic egotism of survival can thus seem to be the primary goal and the single most absorbing activity in the societies the novels offer as versions of our own” (BARICKMAN, p.130).

GRAPHIC XXI
BENIGN FABRICATORS



Victims

In this frame are included those contained in the fabrications discussed above: Arthur, Little Dorrit, Frederick, Affery, Pancks, Flora, Mr. F's Aunt, Mr. Sparkler, Daniel Doyce, Maggy, Cavalletto, the inmates and the Bleeding Hearts.

Arthur Clennam, the deceived son, is a man of reticent behaviour. This reticence can be explained if we consider that

he was a dreamer [...] because he was a man who had, deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without. Bred in meanness and hard dealing, this had rescued him to be a man of honourable mind and open hand. Bred in coldness and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart. Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of reversing the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his Creator in the image of an erring man, this had rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity.
(p.165)

In this description we notice an emphasis on the contrasting effect that Arthur's severe up-bringing had on his character, for he is only endowed with good qualities. However, his "dreaming," introspective manner, which

characterizes one of the “basic keys employed in our society, [that is,] daydreaming,”⁴¹ hides a restless desire to find the truth about his own family. Arthur pursues an inward struggle to set “something” right, to rescue the secret that haunts his house and the past. Through this behaviour, Arthur creates a “vulnerability of experience,” for he suspects and questions a situation.

Arthur’s frame behaviour is mainly characterized by his role as a “victim” within his mother’s “benign fabrication,” for he is contained in the frame established by her “secret”. This “deceiving design” is what generates disbelief in Arthur, for he senses something unexplainable in his mother’s behaviour towards him and his father.

Some may say that Arthur lacks vitality or even “willpower;” however, if we scrutinize the traits left by his up-bringing, as mentioned above, and the psychological scars left in his adulthood, we can say that he is a man with “veiled will” when returning home after twenty years. However, this is a “will” that needs to be revived, something that has to be brought to the surface of his character, as happens at the beginning of the novel when he refuses to continue in the family business and, finally, at the end of the novel, after he spends that period in prison. His inner life, so much reflected in his surroundings, in his “stern” mother and, consequently, his house, goes through a process of renewal during the whole story. Arthur, whose thoughts are revealed to us, does not show himself as just a character going round in circles searching for answers never achieved; he is built up in such a way that the reader follows his inner struggle and the process of maturation he suffers while he is in prison. The retreat experienced by Arthur can be considered as an instance of “downkeying,”⁴² for he distances himself from the outside world. The responses produced in Arthur during the period of imprisonment, his daydream and

⁴¹ GOFFMAN, p.48.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.359.

delusion, are part of the process of inner development he is undergoing, and his physical and psychological state mirrors the inner changes he is suffering at that moment.

Another important role Arthur plays in the novel is that of an “observer”. Such a role can be explained through his characteristic behaviour as a “stranger” throughout the story. As a stranger, he is likely to observe the various levels of behaviour and inner traits of the other characters and the hidden meanings of certain situations, such as Gowan’s effect on the Meagles. In fact, Arthur, through his constant suspicion of some secret that must be kept hidden or muffled and his eagerness to “discover” whatever it is, is endowed with acute sensitivity in relation to his surroundings. Despite such awareness, Arthur is also considered a “stranger” by most of the characters he becomes acquainted with, a fact that further reinforces his behaviour as an observer of them.

Little Dorrit, as much as Arthur, falls into the category of “dupe,” for she is also contained in Mrs Clennam’s fabrication. She also falls into a “parental” trap as Mr. Dorrit also makes use of a “deceitful” type of behaviour in order to be supported by her, that is, he pretends not to know she works outside the prison in order to provide him with food and other treats, as mentioned above.

Little Dorrit is someone “as large as life” (p.177) and her unlimited action proves to be the leading force in the whole novel, something that can be detected in this next description of her features, where the qualifiers “quick” and “busy” give the precise idea of movement and expression to the little figure, for “it was not easy to make out Little Dorrit’s face; [...] But it seemed to be a pale transparent face, *quick* in expression, though not beautiful in feature, its soft hazel eyes excepted. A delicately bent head, a tiny form, a *quick* little pair of *busy* hands, and a shabby dress” (p.53, my italics). Little Dorrit seems to be one

of those characters whose diminutive frame, imperceptible as it is, has to be regarded according to her actions, to her interaction with other characters, something that is overshadowed by her quiet but constructing behaviour. However, this same *busy* behaviour is going to be strongly contrasted with the situation in which Little Dorrit finds herself in the second part of the novel, for “to have no work to do was strange, [...] she now sat in her corner of the luxurious carriage with her little *patient* hands folded before her” (p.463, my italics).

Little Dorrit’s behaviour can also be considered in relation to her link with the Marshalsea prison. This link is later confirmed when she is in Italy, and is able to recognize the prison-like taint in the surroundings and in people’s behaviour. No matter how negative this recognition might seem, it is an example of Little Dorrit’s ease and acceptance in relation to her background and how the prison taint was not able to overshadow her personality and attitude. In relation to Little Dorrit, then, the prison seems to have a singular meaning and characteristic, something that can only be explained to her unchangeability and oneness, as mentioned before. It is true that “since she had begun to work beyond the walls, she had found it necessary to conceal where she lived, and to come and go as secretly as she could, between the free city and the iron gates, outside of which she had never slept in her life” (p.78). However, Little Dorrit’s secrecy cannot be compared to her sister, who is much more concerned with appearance and status. This behaviour can be also explained if we consider Little Dorrit’s ease in coming and going in and out of the prison and how she relates with both realities.

Another characteristic we find in Little Dorrit’s behaviour is that she “was not accustomed to think of herself, or to trouble any one with her emotions” (p.99). From an early age, she is shown as having an extreme awareness of her family’s life and condition in the Marshalsea prison:

at what period of her early life, the little creature *began to perceive* that it was not the habit of all the world to live locked up in narrow yards surrounded by high walls with spikes at the top, would be a difficult question to settle. But she was a very, very little creature indeed [...] A *pitiful and plaintive look*, with which she had begun to regard [her father] when she was extremely young, was perhaps part of this discovery [...and] With a *pitiful and plaintive look* indeed [she regarded] her wayward sister; [and] her idle brother [...] The first half of that space of her life was only accomplished, when her *pitiful and plaintive look* saw her father a widower. From that time the protection that her wondering eyes had expressed towards him, became embodied in action, and the Child of the Marshalsea took upon herself a new relation towards the Father. (p.69-71, my italics)

Little Dorrit's attitude reveals more than just an "observing eye," at this stage of her life, for her "pitiful and plaintive" look reveals her perception of a hard reality and the hard life she would have to endure in order to help those dependent on her. Little Dorrit's endurance underwent many tests after this time, her life within and outside the family circle being marked by countless moments of silent struggle. The family's dependence upon Little Dorrit is entirely reflected in her uncle's words to Arthur: "My brother would have been quite lost without Amy [...] We should all have been lost without Amy. She is a very good girl, Amy. She does her *duty*" (p.94, my italics). Through this comment we perceive that Little Dorrit is placed into a "framework" which not only "traps" her but shows how she is "abused" by the family's selfish behaviour towards her. In this sense Little Dorrit would also be "contained" in a type of "disguised" fabrication, for the family consciously used her. This is confirmed when we consider Arthur's thoughts about Frederick's words:

[he] fancied that he heard in [Frederick's] praises, a certain *tone of custom* which he had heard from the father [before], with an inward protest and feeling of antagonism. It was not that they stinted her praises, or were insensible to what she did for them; but they were *lazily habituated* to her, as they were to all the rest of their condition. He fancied that although they had before them, every day, the means of comparison between her and one another and themselves, they regarded her as being in her necessary

place; as holding a position towards them all which belonged to her, like her name or age. He fancied that they viewed her, not as having risen away from the prison atmosphere, but as appertaining to it; as being vaguely what they had a right to expect, and nothing more. (p.94, my italics)

In one of the few moments in which Little Dorrit expresses any of her opinions in relation to her family, we have a precise idea of what she thinks she represents in their lives. She confesses to Arthur that she is “afraid to leave any one of them [for] when [she is] gone, they *pervert*—but they don’t mean it—even Maggy” (p.262, my italics). This single idea, this *perversion*, is what portrays their behaviour in the novel, for the family, apart from Little Dorrit, believes in a “façade,” in a social “position” which *perverts* their minds and the attitude they maintain. One of the moments in which we see that is when the unexpected fortune appears, for Amy was the only one that could not agree with that life of hypocrisy, of snobbery, something that was totally against her nature. Surprisingly, this was a scene in which the only person capable of raising his voice to defend Little Dorrit from the family’s prejudice was her “ruined uncle,” Frederick. Here we find one of the revealing moments in the narrative, for “it was extraordinary to see of what a burst of earnestness such a decrepit man was capable” (p.485), and his words were the words that denounced the prejudice Little Dorrit had suffered up to that moment:

‘To the winds with the family credit!’ cried the old man, with great scorn and indignation. ‘Brother, I protest against pride. I protest against ingratitude. I protest against any one of us here who have known what we have known, and have seen what we have seen, setting up any pretension that puts Amy at a moment’s disadvantage, or to the cost of a moment’s pain. We may know that it’s a base pretension by its having that effect. It ought to bring a judgment on us. Brother, I protest against it, in the sight of God!’ (p.485)

In this outburst we recognize how much Little Dorrit was wronged by those she loved and helped most. However, the family pretence, which had

begun long ago with Mr. Dorrit at the Marshalsea prison, seems to be ingrained in the family as much as the lasting prison taint that never left them.

Little Dorrit's sense of responsibility towards others grows swiftly, which gives a different connotation to the role she plays in relation to her family. She can be regarded as a very "unreal" character, too good to be true, but her goodness goes beyond any sense of hypocrisy, her unselfish nature stands as one of the few uncorrupted elements within the novel.

Little Dorrit's relationship with her family can be further understood if we consider Forster's comments on them:

The Marshalsea part of the tale undoubtedly was excellent, and there was masterly treatment of character in the contrasts of the brothers Dorrit; but of the family generally it may be said that its least important members had most of his genius in them. The younger of the brothers, the scapegrace son, and "Fanny dear," are perfectly real people in what makes them unattractive; but what is meant for attractiveness in the heroine becomes often tiresome by want of reality.⁴³

This disturbing sense of unreality gathered from Little Dorrit's behaviour, her "goodness" and "helpfulness," makes us attempt to invert the way she is seen and felt, for her goodness is based on reason and understanding towards others. Little Dorrit's life is marked by a sequence of trials in which she is summoned to overcome her meagre means in order to "support" those who depend on her both financially and emotionally. Her good nature is employed so as to provide for the others and not herself, which is what might disturb us in her character.

In one of the most important meetings Little Dorrit has with Mrs Clennam, in answer to Mrs Clennam's reason for keeping the secret, she says:

'angry feelings and unforgiving deeds are no comfort and no guide to you and me. My life has been passed in this poor prison, and my teaching has been defective; but, let me implore you to

⁴³ FORSTER, p.182.

remember later and better days. Be guided only by the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn, the patient Master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if we put all the rest away, and do everything in remembrance of Him. There is no vengeance and no infliction of suffering in His life, I am sure. There can be no confusion in following Him, and seeking for no other footsteps, I am certain.' (p.792)

These words show the wholeness pertaining to her personality and endurance throughout life. Little Dorrit's answer to Mrs Clennam also reveals her attitude towards the "fabrication" they were all contained in; a position which is not only marked by acceptance but which rescues Mrs Clennam from the pit her life had been for all those years. This attitude is an aspect of "the vulnerability of experience," that is, "insider's folly" which occurs "when a construction is discredited [...] and a frame apparently cleared, [and] the plight of the discovered persons tends to be accepted with little reservation, very often with less reservation than was sustained in regard to the initial frame itself".⁴⁴ Her last words to Mrs Clennam reveal a person full of recognition for what life has in store for her. Moreover, her toiling, practical way of dealing with life makes her as real and as convincing as any other heroine whose role is to keep a "machine in motion," no matter what she has to undergo.

As much as Arthur, Little Dorrit also plays the role of an "observer" in the novel, for, as mentioned above, from a very early age she was aware of the family's real condition in life. However, Little Dorrit's vision reaches beyond the family's boundaries and, later, she becomes one of the two characters (together with Arthur) whose life is built through the way they relate to others and the way they apprehend their surroundings. Little Dorrit is as much a "stranger" as Arthur, which explains her observing behaviour. In the first part of the novel, she feels like a stranger outside the walls of the Marshalsea; however, in the

⁴⁴ GOFFMAN, p.473-474.

second part of the novel she is a “stranger” throughout, until she returns to the prison in order to help Arthur.

Frederick Dorrit once described himself as “merely passing on, like the shadow over the sun-dial” (p.80). However, this quiet, subdued man is not really what we are led to believe. The behaviour described above, the same outburst and rebellious attitude we see in Affery and Pancks, (the same type of frame break) towards the end of the novel, shows us that these are characters whose importance should not be underestimated. In the case of Frederick, someone “who was not much observed at any time, except by Little Dorrit” (p.484), we see a man whose “shuffling” footstep and slow movements hide a highly tuned mind, someone whose unnoticed presence works as a shield and filters what is left of his “ruined” past. In his words to Arthur, and in the reaction mentioned above, we perceive this hidden personality.

During their lives as rich people Frederick

was so far rescued from that shadow of old, that he wore the clothes they gave him, and performed some ablutions as a sacrifice to the family credit, and went where he was taken, with a certain patient animal enjoyment, which seemed to express that the air and change did him good. In all others respects, save one, he shone with no light but such as was reflected from his brother. His brother’s greatness, wealth, freedom, and grandeur, pleased him without any reference to himself. Silent and retiring, he had no use for speech when he could hear his brother speak; no desire to be waited on, so that the servants devoted themselves to his brother. The only noticeable change he originated in himself, was an alteration in his manner to his younger niece. Every day it refined more and more into a marked respect, very rarely shown by age to youth, and still more rarely susceptible, one would have said, of the fitness with which he invested it. (p.457)

Apart from an account of Frederick’s attitude in his new life as a rich man, here we have an emphasis in his respect towards his brother. The greatness in Frederick’s behaviour lies on the fact that, despite being a “victim” of William’s financial recklessness, he never accused his brother or charged him

with his faults. On the contrary, Frederick's devotion to that "vain" brother and to Little Dorrit is clearly expressed on the occasion of William's death (p.650-651).

Being as underestimated and condescended to as he was, by himself and others, this "ruined uncle" had behaved awkwardly throughout the novel. He sank into his "uselessness" and into quiet oblivion of what was left of his life. However, we learn that humble Frederick was also the "beginning of it all" (p.779). By being responsible for the Dorrits' involvement in Mrs Clennam's secret, he gains a new light within the labyrinthine world of the novel and becomes, together with his family, another wronged individual in her "wrathful" enterprise. Frederick, like Arthur and the other members of the family, becomes contained in her fabrication.

The Meagles—Mr. and Mrs Meagles, Pet and Tattycoram—form another framework of victims in the story. As Mr. and Mrs Meagles are "practical" people, they stand as an example of the mind that, in its "practicality," sees and feels reality in a disentangled way, very different from the burdens we see on Arthur or Little Dorrit's parents. This disentanglement of Mr. Meagles' mind can be perceived in one of his first speeches in the novel: "Allong and marshong, indeed. It would be more creditable to you, I think, to let other people allong and marshong about their lawful business, instead of shutting 'em up in quarantine" (p.15). However, Mr. Meagles's practical sense is put in check when he is met by Arthur, at the entrance of the Circumlocution Office, with Daniel Doyce. Here we find Mr. Meagles with a different attitude, that is, "with a choleric face" and "angrily" collaring Mr. Doyce out of the Office, an attitude that is only explained to us, and Arthur, through his righteous, practical way of dealing with those that try to interfere with the Circumlocution Office. In relation to Pet and, indirectly, to Tattycoram, Mr. Meagles, the father-figure, shows behaviour that is far from "practical". Pet is

overprotected, a fact that can be linked with the loss of her twin sister, Lillie, for Mr. Meagles tells Arthur that

‘Pet and her baby sister were so exactly alike, and so completely one, that in our thoughts we have never been able to separate them. It would be of no use to tell us that our dead child was a mere infant. We have changed that child according to the changes in the child spared to us, and always with us. As Pet has grown, that child has grown; as Pet has become more sensible and womanly, her sister has become more sensible and womanly, by just the same degrees. It would be as hard to convince me that if I was to pass into the other world to-morrow, I should not, through the mercy of God, be received there by a daughter, just like Pet, as to persuade me that Pet herself is not a reality at my side.’
(p.19)

This reality he creates in relation to Pet is a paradoxical one, because although embodying and transferring the idea of a dead child into a living one may seem practical, in fact it shows a way of evading the hardship imposed by death. In a sense the Meagles’ “circumlocution” towards death demonstrates a disguised, “practical” way of dealing with reality. This is “self-deception,”⁴⁵ for the Meagles instead of taking a realistic view towards the death of one of the daughters, deliberately decide to “believe” both are alive in order to accept the loss of one of them. In a different way, the same is done in relation to Tattycoram. This foundling’s role, in the most naïve manner, seems to be that of Pet’s little maid, although “[she is] younger than [Pet] by two or three years” (p.26). Here we find another of the illogical attitudes of this “practical” couple, for they cannot perceive that what they give to Tatty is not what she wants but what seems to be enough for her existence. Unfortunately, the Meagles’ sense of “practicality” does not allow them to perceive Tatty’s “outrageous” behaviour and the reason for it. By analyzing these two examples we see that this “practicality,” in spite of the couple’s good nature, may have a dual role in their life, that is, on the one hand it may represent a business-like way of controlling

⁴⁵ GOFFMAN, p.111-112.

life which “belonged to the scales and scoop” (p.198), a way linked to Mr. Meagles’ actions towards Arthur and Daniel Doyce, and on the other, an escape from reality, for he is not able to face the idea of a lost child and the fact that a foundling deserves and desires to be more than a rescued child.

The Meagles, then, lead us to *Pet*, a very spoilt young woman, a “beautiful only child,” who does not have much to say for herself and whose emotion and naïveté lead her to an unfortunate marriage with Mr. Gowan. Although Pet, much cherished and loved by her parents and people around her, is not very exploited or developed as a character in the novel; she is used to highlight others’ traits and behaviour: through Pet’s character we learn of Arthur’s underestimated of himself, for he torments himself with the question of

whether he should allow himself to fall in love with Pet [for] he was twice her age. Well! He was young in appearance, young in health and strength, young in heart. A man certainly not old at forty; and many men were not in circumstances to marry, or did not marry, until they had attained that time of life. On the other hand, the question was, not what he thought of the point, but what she thought of it [...] Arthur Clennam was a retiring man, with a sense of many deficiencies; and he so exalted the merits of the beautiful Minnie in his mind, and depressed his own, that when he pinned himself to this point, his hopes began to fail him. He came to the final resolution [...] that he would *not* allow himself to fall in love with Pet. (p.195)

Therefore, Pet’s role as a beautiful, young lady seems to be to mirror and reaffirm Arthur’s sense of self-disparagement as an “aged” and unworthy man. As much as Little Dorrit, Pet arouses in him that sense of absurdity, of oddity in relation to himself as a grown-up man, as someone who cannot have and cannot make use of his wishes.

Apart from Arthur, Pet, this “poor [...], self-deceived, mistaken child!” (p.336) plays a crucial role in relation to Henry Gowan, her husband, for she is used to show his “real form”. In other words, Pet is a “self-deceived” dupe (she builds up the same frame of “understandable error” as her father) contained in

Gowan's fabricated behaviour as a loving fiancé, for their marriage is intended only to give him status and money.

Tattycoram, the foundling, behaves awkwardly towards her adopting family. She is a vulnerable young girl who, owing to her stubborn temper and behaviour, unfortunately falls into the hands of the "shadowy" Miss Wade. Tatty is a character whose process of development is linked to her attachment to this evil creature and, in the same way as Pet, she can be said to work as a reference to show another character's inner traits, in this case, Miss Wade. Concerning these two characters we can mention Forster's view about the treatment Dickens gave them:

The surface-painting of both Miss Wade and Tattycoram, to take an instance, is anything but attractive, yet there is under it a rare force of likeness in the unlikeness between the two which has much subtlety of intention; and they must both have had, as well as Mr. Gowan himself, a striking effect in the novel, if they had been made to contribute in a more essential way to its interest or development.⁴⁶

As Forster says, they do not contribute much to the development of the story but they stand as a very subtle example of the juxtaposition of opposite forces in the novel. This juxtaposition can be further explored if we analyze how the treatment given to Tatty's role in the novel, the way her "curious name" is carefully created and explained, her linking to the "comely and healthy" Meagles and, later on, to the "evil" Miss Wade, show us that her character is of a certain amount of importance to the inner workings of the story. The point to be raised here is that the recurrent linking of "good and bad" characters within the novel expresses much more than the twofold characteristic of human beings, for Tatty's character can be considered to work as a model for the "threatening transition" that exists from one level to the other. This threat is justified if we

⁴⁶ FORSTER, p.184.

consider how afraid and attracted Tatty first felt in relation to Miss Wade during their encounter in the Quarantine quarters. Here, Miss Wade seemed to come to Tatty as “[her] own anger, [her] own malice, [her] own—whatever it [was]” (p.26). Furthermore, in their later alliance, this same feeling is presented as Arthur perceives “how each of the two natures must [have] constantly [been] tearing the other to pieces” (p.661), for Tattycoram was, despite her untamed personality, emotionally dependent on Miss Wade. This dependence is only overcome when Tatty, tired of Miss Wade’s psychological tyranny, decides to help Mr. Meagles (thus breaking the “exploitive frame” built by Miss Wade, and perceiving the nature of the activity she was contained in).

Through her returning to the Meagles’ side, she not only achieves her physical release but she manages to keep within the boundaries of the transition mentioned above. The nature of this transition can be further explained if Tatty is considered in relation to Miss Wade and the villainous Blandois. By being placed in contact with the two most evil forces within the novel, Tatty was forced and challenged to experience not only the double effect of their evil nature but also the threat of not being able to overcome or subdue the shadowy impulse that was in full development within herself.

Affery, the dreamer, is a victim, for she is totally contained in the “illusion” Jeremiah creates around what she really sees and hears in the Clennams’ house, which characterizes an instance of “other-induced”⁴⁷ fabrication. It is important to note the connection we can make between Affery’s dreams⁴⁸ and the secret of the house for, all the moments in which this past life is in evidence, that is, in which the fantasy world of the past was being shuffled,

⁴⁷ GOFFMAN, p.116.

⁴⁸ According to Hutchinson, dreams represent a form of language game, that is, *adumbration*, which “may take the form of an omen or prophecy, a vision or dream, a picture which the author has himself made up, a “play within the play” [...] an interpolated narrative or a “parallel” plot strand in which actions of one strand bear a relationship to those in the other, or an event which appears to have symbolic significance” (HUTCHINSON, p.52).

Affery was supposed to be “dreaming” and not experiencing reality, whatever that meant in the Clennam’s household. Dreams or not, they create a type of “interpolated narrative” within the story, for they symbolize not only the physical decay of the house but the progressive “closing in” of the game proposed in Mrs Clennam’s secret. The “dreams,” which are much more Jeremiah’s creation than Affery’s, are employed as a means to provide information about the story, to emphasize Affery’s theatrical behaviour, to set in motion a series of action and interaction between characters and to prepare the reader for the dénouement of the story. In this sense they act as “omens” for they are built on “strange visions” and “mysterious sounds”. The noises heard by Affery provide a type of “ambiguity,” for she becomes “in doubt about what it is that is going on”.⁴⁹ Such an ambiguity concerns primary frameworks, for these frameworks organize activity, and because the organization deriving from any point of doubt will quickly be resolved through the information provided by the circumstances in which the doubt occurs. Here we have an overlapping of frames of action—the one created by Mrs Clennam and Jeremiah would be linked to that “created” through Affery’s dreams. *Affery*, then, becomes an important part in this disguised world of appearances, for her theatrical way, as mentioned before—her covering her head with the apron in order to avoid seeing what was not supposed to be seen—has a very hilarious and effective result in the “stern” house. This type of behaviour is called “flood-out”⁵⁰—Affery, in panic, finds a way to run away from what happens. She also creates “doubt”⁵¹ as to what she “sees and hears,” but does not break Jeremiah’s frame of action until the end of the novel. Therefore Affery also plays an important role for, indirectly urged by Pancks (p.766), she decides to rebel, to go against “them two

⁴⁹ GOFFMAN, p.302-305.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.350.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.122.

clever ones,” and “tell [her] dreams” (p.766). This helps to clarify many veiled aspects that were behind her “dream-like” experience in the house. Such behaviour reveals another layer within Affery’s performance because she commits “social sabotage;” that is, “she violates the rules of the frame interaction she is helping to sustain,”⁵² going against the norms and against Jeremiah’s tyranny and mastery over her, so that there is a reversal in attitude at the end of the story, where she breaks the frame she was kept in.

Pancks, is the steaming tug, who

perspiring and puffing and darting about in eccentric directions, and becoming hotter and dingier every moment, [...] lashed the tide of the yard into a most agitated and turbid state [.The Yard] had not settled down into calm water again, full two hours after he had been seen fuming away on the horizon at the top of the steps. (p.279)

Pancks can be considered a victim, for he is urged by the Patriarch to perform his duty, hence his reaction at the end of the novel. Pancks also shows very curious behaviour, for he is mysterious, something that is not expressed through the darkness of his attire and being, but by his uncommon way of knowing and getting involved with the most unlikely figures. Pancks has a characteristic—to be a fortune-teller and gypsy—which opens a distinctive frame behaviour in his role in the novel. Pancks’s fortune-telling is an instance of “astounding complex,”⁵³ for an event occurs, or is made to occur, and observers are led to doubt their overall approach to it, since in order to accept the occurrence new kinds of natural or “supernatural” forces will have to be considered. Pancks becomes the agent of “fortuitousness,”⁵⁴ for he incidentally produces an important event. Pancks, “properly guiding his doings, by collecting

⁵² GOFFMAN, p.426.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.33.

“names,” meets with the natural workings of the world in a way he could not be expected to anticipate, with consequential results [...] Because no responsibility is imputed, one has something like a natural framework, except that the ingredients upon which the natural forces operate are here socially guided doings”.⁵⁵ His action brings a “happenstance”⁵⁶—a type of “fortuitousness”—in the Dorrits’ life. In addition, Pancks amazes us with his sudden outburst against Mr. Casby’s stinginess (p.800-801). In this act, he performs the same frame break as Affery, that is, a “confrontation”—a type of “social sabotage,” marked by “an open frontal attack upon the ground rules of a social occasion”.⁵⁷ Pancks ridicules and confronts the Patriarch inside Bleeding Heart Yard and in front of the Bleeding Hearts, which gives strength to his act and to the unmasking of the benevolent figure. This behaviour is entirely in keeping with his disinterested help to Little Dorrit’s family, to his sympathizing with Cavalletto, to his friendship with Arthur and the well-meant behaviour we can see towards the Bleeding Hearts at the end of the novel. Pancks is a character who disturbs other characters with his “tug-like” behaviour, with his “puffing and steaming” all over the place; however, he is a character whose inner traits are hidden behind his uncontrollable action. Pancks only seeks to help and pull forward those who are in need, as is seen in relation to the Dorrits, the Bleeding Hearts and Arthur.

Flora, Mr. Casby’s *deceived daughter*, as mentioned above, must be praised for her action as the hilarious “chatter-box” who gives us an overwhelming example of the blend of the “sense of the sorrowful and [the] sense of the comical” (p.155) in *Little Dorrit*. Her behaviour is also marked by “frame vulnerability”—her gestures and speech (the same that we find in Mr.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.33-34.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.428.

Dorrit's) express the signs sent by a rambling mind. This idea is clearly expressed in Dickens's comments on her:

"There are some things in Flora in number seven that seem to be extraordinarily droll, with something serious at the bottom of them after all. Ah, well! was there not something very serious in it once? Nothing in Flora made me laugh so much as the confusion of ideas between gout flying upwards, and its soaring with Mr. F. to another sphere. (7 April)".⁵⁸

The emphasis of Flora's character is built up on "speech," in her way of never coming to a full stop or only doing so if she "had at last talked herself out of breath for one moment" (p.153).⁵⁹ Flora's "disjointed" way of behaving shows not only a character whose anxiety is expressed to the full on the surface, a source of comic relief in the novel, but also a character whose sensitivity transforms her, during the course of the story, into "a caricature of [a] girlish manner" (p.150), an example of a tragi-comic behaviour. Flora is not only the grown-up woman conscious of her "dreadful" (p.151) appearance, of being "a mere fright [...] fearfully changed [into] an old woman" (p.150), coming and going into the memories of an eighteen-year-old girl, but she is also the product of paternal selfishness and hypocrisy. As Arthur observes, "she left about half of herself at eighteen years of age behind and grafted the rest on to the relic of the late Mr.F, thus making a moral mermaid of herself" (p.155). On top of that, we perceive that Flora, apart from her "loquacity," also fluctuates between the old days and "the present" through comforting

her soul with agonies of mysterious signalling, expressing dread of discovery. With the sensation of becoming more and more lightheaded every minute, Clennam saw the relict of the late Mr. F. enjoying herself in the most wonderful manner, by putting

⁵⁸ FORSTER, p.185.

⁵⁹ Frow says that "Flora's rambling strings of free association are almost impenetrable because she in fact speaks both parts of a dialogue. This means that she can assume total comprehension of her presuppositions because there is no need of a response from the actual interlocutor whom she uses as a prop" (FROW, J. "Voice and Register in *Little Dorrit*." CL 33 (Summer 1981):269).

herself and him in their old places, and going through all the old performances—now when the stage was dusty, when the scenery was faded, when the youthful actors were dead, when the orchestra was empty, when the lights were out. (p.155)

This juxtaposition of Flora's behaviour and the faded scene of an old theatre shows the essence of this tragi-comic character. Flora is much more than a "heedless and loose talker, [she is] an honest creature, woman of capital points" (p.289), whose behaviour (which deeply disturbs Arthur) is nothing but the sign left by memories and old beliefs. Flora's behaviour creates "vulnerability of experience," for her "fleeting expressions" influence Arthur's understanding of what is really going on. This happens because he notices her embarrassment and awkward mannerisms, which clearly show her insecurity towards him and life in general. According to Goffman, "these fleeting expressions are important because they suggest that what we take to be actually going on might not be, that we might be wrong about its laminations, and as this holds for our perception of [another person], so it holds, we know, for his perception of us".⁶⁰

Flora's character can be seen in full bloom when she receives Little Dorrit in her house for the first time. Here Flora shows in "the word and action of a moment [...] the best-natured manner in the world" (p.281) and what is hidden behind those "scattered words [uttered at a] galloping pace" (p.283). This is, among other things, the sign of dependence and, probably, the effect of "some brown liquid that smelt like brandy" (p.283). As she explains to Little Dorrit, "the flavour is anything but agreeable being a poor creature and it may be have never recovered the shock received in youth from too much giving way to crying in the next room when separated from Arthur" (p.283). Although this inclination to alcohol (and food) had already been noticed by Arthur at dinner the first time he returned to the Patriarch's house (p.158), on that occasion it did

⁶⁰ GOFFMAN, p.487.

not seem as straightforward as in Little Dorrit's presence, for, now, Flora felt compelled to explain the reason for it. In sum, Flora's "rambling manner" and hidden alcoholism were the result of years of inner struggle to accept and understand what led her "patriarchal" father and Mrs Clennam to "[sever] the golden bond that bound [them]" (p.270). Flora, then, is another character contained in Mrs Clennam's fabrication (and her father's narrow-mindedness), for she also suffered the effects of Arthur's forced exile in China, apart from the fact that she was ignorant of the real reason for their separation. This thought can also be linked to the sense of guilt expressed in her effortless attempt to explain to Arthur how she felt and what happened in "that dreary period" (p.154) after their separation, and how she became "the statue bride of the late Mr. F" (p.285). Flora, then, is a character who enshrouded herself with a "dark mystery" (p.285) and feelings that are grasped in her jumbled, but meaningful, talk and behaviour.⁶¹ Her "tragi-comic," sharp sensitivity is seen in her description of Mrs Clennam as "highly sensible and firm but dreadfully severe—ought to be the mother of the man in the iron mask" (p.283), a remark which straightforwardly summarizes Mrs Clennam's attitude and personality. This description is only outdone by that given to Mr. Dorrit, for Flora starts by saying that

[Clennam and Co.] 'is a very different person indeed' [...] 'with no limbs and wheels instead and the grimmest of women' [...] Mr. Dorrit looked as if he must immediately be driven out of his mind by this account. Neither was it rendered more favourable to sanity by Flora's dashing into a rapid analysis of Mr. Flintwinch's cravat, and describing him, without the lightest boundary line of separation between his identity and Mrs Clennam's, as a rusty screw in gaiters. Which compound of man and woman, no limbs, wheels, rusty screw, grimness, and gaiters, so completely stupefied Mr. Dorrit, that he was a spectacle to be pitied. (p.624)

⁶¹ Flora's behaviour and talk are characterized by the same types of "frames" which form Mr. Dorrit's, that is, "suppressible diversions," "comfort actions" and "flooding out".

Flora's frame of action is enhanced by her legacy, *Mr. F's Aunt*, an old woman of

extreme severity and grim taciturnity; sometimes interrupted by a propensity to offer remarks in a deep warning voice, which, being totally uncalled for by anything said by anybody, and traceable to no association of ideas, confounded and terrified the mind. Mr. F's Aunt may have thrown in these observations on some system of her own, and it may have been ingenious, or even subtle; but the key to it was wanted. (p.157)

Apart from her severe countenance, the emphasis given to this idiosyncratic character seems to rely on her "voice," for her behaviour is marked by the times it is used and the utter uneasiness it creates on those hearing it. The subtle system of ideas created in her mind can explain Mr. F's Aunt's function in the story.

Apparently, her function seems to be unidentifiable. However, through her "deep warning voice [...which] confounded and terrified the mind" we notice that her role reaches the limit between sense and the absurd, for the amazing characteristic of this awkward behaviour is that it always seems to be directed towards Arthur. Dickens might have wanted to create in this character a kind of a ventriloquist's puppet, one that, in "a violent twitch, calculated to produce a startling effect on the nerves of the uninitiated and with the deadliest animosity" (p.273), utters the most outrageous comments without any warning or reason. Such behaviour marks a break in the frame of the activity she is in. In a sense, Arthur would be the target, the "victim" of the fabrication produced through her talk. During a visit to Arthur's office,

a diversion was occasioned [...] by Mr. F's Aunt making the following inexorable and awful statement: 'There's mile-stones on the Dover road!' With such mortal hostility towards the human race did she discharge this missile, that Clennam was quite at a loss how to defend himself; the rather as he had been already perplexed in his mind by the honour of a visit from this venerable lady, when it was plain she held him in the utmost abhorrence. He could not but look at her with disconcertment, as she sat

breathing bitterness and scorn, and staring leagues away. (p.268-269)

Mr. F's Aunt's speech reminds us of that of a fool, for she always seems to be talking through "riddles,"⁶²—another device used to create "vulnerability of experience"—through some hidden code which is only understood by herself. It reminds us of a fool's talk for she manages to disturb⁶³ and puzzle those contained in it. This puzzlement can be said to be intentionally provoked by the author, for it is a way of directly intruding in the characters' realm and fiercely introducing remarks that point out someone's fears. Considering Arthur's psychological development in the novel, it seems plausible that Dickens used Mr. F's Aunt as the speaker for such "messages," for her role is entirely "disconnected" from others' and represents that outward "voice" which traps someone's inner weaknesses.

Mr. Sparkler, the limited talented son and husband, is a victim owing to his mother's protective attitude towards him; to his having the duty to perform a satisfactory role in Society, for "Mr. Merdle did not want a son-in-law for himself; he wanted a son-in-law for Society" (p.248); and owing to Fanny's entrapping him in a "socially" acceptable and convenient marriage.

Daniel Doyce, the untamed engineer, represents all society's victims in relation to the Circumlocution Office. Doyce strives to have his invention recognized in England but has to go abroad in order to achieve this. As in Mr. Meagles' words to Arthur:

'Doyce is a wonderful fellow over there. [...] he is making out his case like a house a-fire. He has fallen on his legs, has Dan. Where they don't want things done and find a man to do 'em, that man's off his legs; but where they do want things done and find a man to do 'em, that man's on his legs. [...] Dan has done without 'em.' (p.822)

⁶² GOFFMAN, p.443.

⁶³ FROW, p.269.

Doyce represents one of the forces which propels the individual to go against the boundaries imposed upon him. In the same way as Arthur has to go into prison in order to achieve his freedom, Doyce has to leave the country in order to fulfil his dream of being an inventor, for “Britannia is a Britannia in the manger—won’t give her children such distinctions herself, and won’t allow them to be seen when they are given by other countries” (p.823).

Maggy, the grown-up child, is also an “adopted” member of the Dorrit family, someone who “stumbled, with a large balance of success against her failures” (p.102). Maggy is not only Little Dorrit’s “big child,” she is Little Dorrit’s creative and caring friend. Maggy, in her awkward way, can go “on errands as well as anyone [...] and [is] as trustworthy as the Bank of England [...]and] she [earns] her own living entirely” (p.101). Through her, Dickens was also directing criticism at the way children were ill-treated in his period. Maggy is the product of an ill up-bringing, someone whose comfort was to find someone like her “little Mother” in order to survive. Maggy, on the few occasions in which her character acts in the story, proves to be someone filled with deep sensitivity and “knowledge” of others’ inner life. No wonder it is Maggy who suggests to her “Little Mother” that she tells the story of “a Princess [...] and let her be a reg’lar one [beyond] all belief, you know” (p.292). So Maggy, unconsciously, induces Little Dorrit to tell her own story. Maggy, then, can be compared to that inner voice which forces human beings to face or to acknowledge their hidden truths once in a while. Here we detect an important element of the frame behaviour established by Maggy—she becomes the listener, the one who shares Little Dorrit’s secret. Maggy, someone who began “to take pains to improve herself, and to be very attentive and very industrious [...] and got enough to do to support herself, and does support herself” (p.102) is one of those characters whose childish behaviour is outweighed by her impressive personality.

John Baptist Cavalletto, the good-hearted foreigner, with his one-dimensional behaviour, keeps himself faithful to his benevolent attitude throughout the story. Cavalletto's frame of action is marked by his role as a foreigner for he himself establishes the boundaries and limitations of his interaction with other characters. Cavalletto's role as an outsider is clearly reinforced by his speech (already analysed in 1.4), the element which most clearly differentiates him in the story. The fact of his being a foreigner, a traveller, sets a frame of action which is confirmed by his talk. Cavalletto's foreign accent causes "vulnerability of experience," that is, "physical and cultural handicaps associated with the apparatus of communication"⁶⁴ which are responsible for the disorganization of an activity, for other individuals involved in it are subject to the interference caused by this handicap. This is perceived through his interaction with the Bleeding Hearts, for they were utterly disturbed by his foreign language.

Cavalletto has already been compared to Little Dorrit because of his diminutive figure and angelic behaviour, or even to Daniel Doyce, with his artistic and inventive nature.⁶⁵ However, he can be said to have another kind of function within the novel apart from being the representative of the lower classes, the subdued and dominated ones. Cavalletto has also a kind of "aura" hanging over him which transforms him into one of those few characters in a novel who seem to inhabit the outskirts of the main train of action but has, in fact, its functional role in it.

At the beginning of the novel we see a humble character, who changes himself into a craftsman, a singer or a precise "clock," depending on the situation. Later on, this humble character gives way to his "will" and runs away

⁶⁴ GOFFMAN, p.493.

⁶⁵ ZELICOVICI, D. "The First Chapter of *Little Dorrit* - Overture to the Novel." *Ariel - A Review of International English Literature*. 13 (April 1982):58.

from Rigaud (p.133), which in turn leads him to London, to cross Arthur's path carried on a litter as "a recumbent figure [...] a burden" (p.161) and, consequently, to be led to Bleeding Heart Yard where he became "the lame foreigner with the stick, [...] humbly propitiating the general good-will with his white teeth" (p.302). This is, then, a further turn in Cavalletto's life, for here he is recognized for his good nature and, later on, he will play a key role in Arthur's life, that is, he is responsible for a "frame break" in Blandois' blackmail when he tells Arthur about his past life (p.670). Here then occurs a "serial containment"⁶⁶ which indicates that Blandois, who is the original fabricator, is taken in by Cavalletto, someone not directly involved in his villainous enterprise.

Apart from representing an angelic being, someone who is beyond the threats of the physical world, Cavalletto is also compared to a "clock," because he "maps" Marseilles and the world around it with high precision and he gives us the exact time he and Rigaud had served in prison: "I [Cavalletto], eleven weeks, to-morrow night at midnight. You, nine weeks and three days, at five this afternoon" (p.8). This "precision" stands for his transparency and wholeness which are in deep contrast to the multifaceted Rigaud.

In the lowest layer of the victims' frame, we find the Marshalsea's *inmates* whose behaviour is deeply affected by Society's fabrications, for

their walk was the walk of a *race apart*. They had a peculiar way of doggedly slinking round the corner, as if they were eternally going to the pawnbroker's. When they coughed, they coughed like people accustomed to be forgotten on door-steps and in draughty passages, waiting for answers to letters in faded ink, which gave the recipients of those manuscripts great mental disturbance and no satisfaction. (p.91)

This "race apart" was the product, the "dupe" of Mr. Merdle's Society. However, this "race" seems to be far from comparable to the two

⁶⁶ GOFFMAN, p.180.

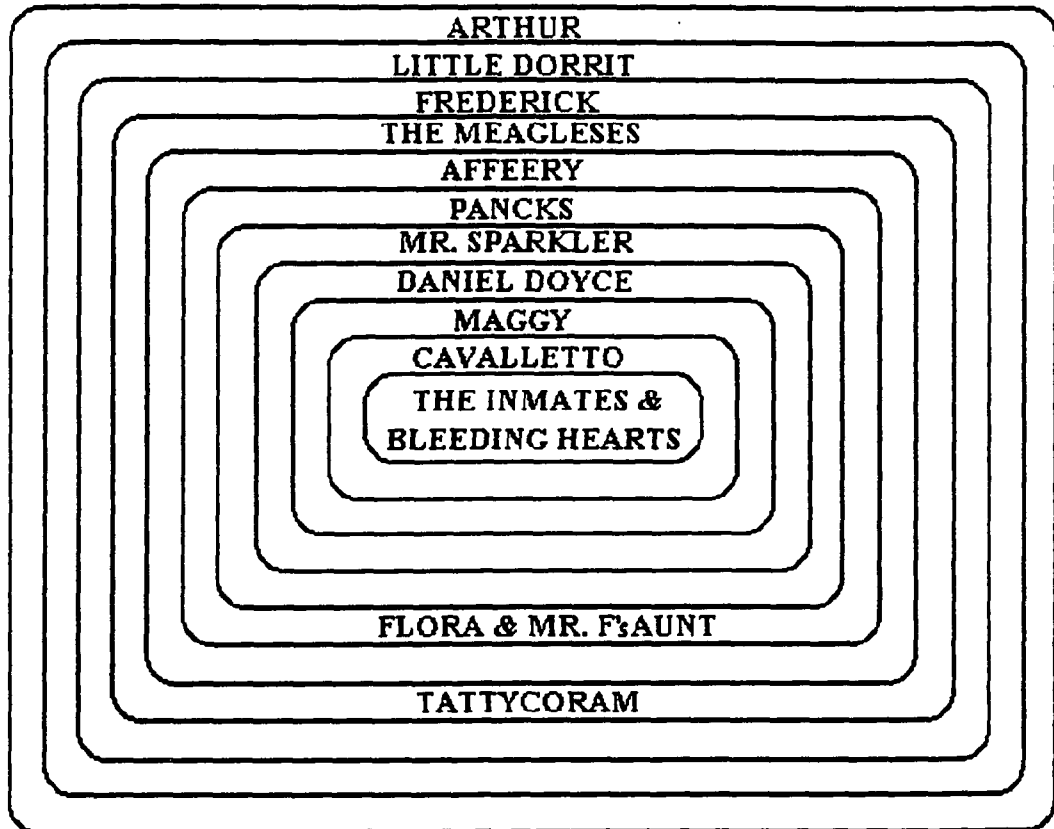
representatives we have of it at the beginning of the novel, Rigaud and Cavalletto, who, in spite of being prisoners in worse conditions, formed a different framework. Their attitude, despite their conflicting personalities, does not show or express any of the characteristics above for they succeed in freeing themselves (although Rigaud does it only for a while) in order to try to belong to a “higher” society. Cavalletto, in his turn, has to struggle in order to be part of a society which pretended to accept him and his position as a “foreigner” within it.

The Bleeding Hearts, another distinctive “race,” was “always grinding, drudging, toiling, every minute [they] were awake” (p.160). Despite their lower level in society they were also an easy target for “deception,” as they not only believed in the Patriarch’s “benevolence” but they admired “the great Merdle” and what he represented in the society above theirs. In this sense both levels of society were vulnerable to misguidance and deceit in the way they “perceived” those who were in power.

Graphic XXIII shows the frames formed by the victims:

GRAPHIC XXII

VICTIMS



The analysis of the organization of social interaction in *Little Dorrit* enabled us to identify the characters' specific behaviour and the pattern it formed in the story. This pattern helped us to establish the links the characters had with one another and the consequences of these links. Through their various types of behaviour we could also perceive how Dickens managed to interweave their individual inner traits in order to form a whole in which society could be visualized and analysed.

Moreover, the division detected in terms of characters' behaviour as *fabricators*—exploitive and benign—and *victims* gives us the grounds for establishing another "frame break" inside the structural elements controlling the novel.

This “break” leads us to another relevant aspect of the characters’ behaviour which is based on the rules of a *game*, the game established by social interaction. Our next step, then, is to analyse the effect of this “game” on the development of frames within the structure of the novel, and how the “vulnerability” created by the games modifies the perception we readers have of the intention beneath the literal framework of the novel.

1.6.1. Games Within Games

‘Words, sir, never influence the course of the cards, or the course of the dice. Do you know that? You do? I also play a game, and words are without power over it.’

Rigaud Blandois⁶⁷

The *characters’ games*, or *fabrications*, that will be presented here are the consequences of the various behaviours analysed above, for they are related to the characters’ action and interaction but on a different level. Here, we will show the inner workings of their behaviour, the hidden intentions which underlie their relationship. Moreover, we will show how much the organization of the *games* is used to emphasize the structure established by the two leading forces in the novel, the deceivers (fabricators/rulers) and the deceived (victims/ruled).

In order to show how these games work in terms of structure, they will be divided into two categories: *higher* hierarchy games and *lower* hierarchy games. This classification completes the idea of the division of society in *Little Dorrit*. These two societies, then, will work in a self-reflexive way, for in both of them it is possible to detect distinctive traces of hierarchical divisions which are characteristic of the games perceived in them.

⁶⁷ DICKENS, C. *Little Dorrit*, p.745.

1.6.1.1. Higher Hierarchy Games

This division will discuss the foregrounded level of characters in the story, who belong to a higher hierarchical sphere in society and behave as “deceivers/fabricators”.

This “game” behaviour is first introduced in the novel by *Rigaud Blandois*, when he says to Cavalletto, still in Marseilles prison, “A gentleman I am, a gentleman I’ll live, and a gentleman I’ll die! It’s my intent to be a gentleman. It’s my *game*. Death of my soul, I play it out wherever I go!” (p.9, my italics) The paradoxical idea of a prisoner being a “gentleman” foreshadows the crucial role Rigaud will play on both hierarchy levels of action. Rigaud, with his “devilish” aspect and his cunning mind, acts in such a way that his net is spread little by little over his victims. However he is trapped by it himself at the end. This character disturbs us all through the story by his coming and going as he pleases, appearing and disappearing whenever and wherever it suits his “game”. Rigaud’s playful behaviour is stringly emphasized, throughout the novel, in his speech and in the way he introduces himself to others: “I am playful; playfulness is part of my amiable character. Playfully, I become as one slain and hidden” (p.769). As said before, Rigaud plays an important, twofold part in Mrs Clennam’s secret, so he can be called the “deceiver” within the frame established by her secret in the story. Apart from his link with Mrs Clennam (although she does not know the exact nature of this link until the very end) “Monsieur Blandois of Paris” (p.489) is put together with a character that plays the same “game,” Henry Gowan, his intimate friend. Curiously enough, Mr. Gowan has the same “diabolical and cruel” behaviour, although in a different, less obvious way, which explains his link with Blandois. Here we have one of Blandois’ strategic manoeuvres in the story, for he manages to become acquainted with the Dorrits in order to observe them better.

Blandois also involves Miss Wade in his scheme and she is highly influenced by it. However, Blandois seems to act by himself in his deceit although it is clear that Miss Wade's mind is also behind it—the disappearance of the iron box—and their link becomes fully understandable, for they are two of the most “villainous” characters in the novel.

Blandois takes us directly to the next deceiver, *Mrs Clennam*, and her game towards Arthur and the Dorrits. Mrs Clennam, the follower of a “stern” religion, is the person who deceives and “rules” a group of people until some “devilish” being decides to box her into a corner and make her rush out of her wheel-chair in order to save her honour. Mrs Clennam's game, which was backed by the loyal (but clever) Jeremiah, goes as far as her need of repentance takes her. In other words, her stern religiousness, despite its erroneous teaching, makes her a weak, vulnerable woman who has nothing else to cling to apart from old beliefs. Unfortunately, her behaviour is that of a psychological cripple who can only envisage “hope” when threatened by a villain like Blandois, who had nothing to lose. Mrs Clennam's game, which had been falling and “cracking” since the beginning of the novel—as seen through Arthur's doubts about the family's past and his abandoning the business—shows not only how she was deceived by her own beliefs, but also how she was deceived, as much as by Jeremiah, in relation to how both ran their business and their lives.

Mr. Merdle, the mighty Merdle, is another deceiver who acts in Society, whose only game was to practice forgery and fraud on others, whether linked to him or not. Mr. Merdle's game is a criticism of those who rule Society and those who are taken in by it, for the game did not end with his suicide, but went further and further until everybody paid for it, including his family. Mr. Merdle was a character who did not grasp the implications of what he was doing, for he was as deceived by this same Society as were those who admired him. Suicide seemed the only way to finish this game of deception.

The same kind of subtle game as Mr. Merdle's was played by *the Patriarch*, in the role of the benevolent "father". First, it is perceived in relation to Flora, how he, influenced by Mrs Clennam, interfered in Flora's relationship with Arthur. Second, it is indirectly applied to and performed by Pancks, who acted as a go-between towards the Patriarch's tenants. Third, his patriarchal game is played on the Bleeding Hearts, for his sole intention was to "squeeze" those poor devils to the bones. The Patriarch's "moral game" (p.800) lasted until Pancks decided it could no longer be maintained.

Miss Wade, guided by her deceitful game as a manipulator, is ruled by bitterness, cruelty and revenge. Her attitude can be clearly linked to that of Blandois and Henry Gowan, for they are characterized by the same mischievous desire to trap people. However, no matter how hard she tries to involve Tattycoram and the Meagles in her game, she is the only one damaged by it, for what she gains at the end is loneliness.

The Circumlocution Office, which represented the combined games of the Merdles and the Barnacles, helped Society and not the "Public," as Mr. Tite Barnacle tries to explain to Arthur, through its "winding" game: a game supposed to trap people in such a way that nothing could be done to reverse the situation. The "circumlocution" movement to which its employers were drawn was the very movement with which Society took in its public. It was the movement of a whirlwind determined to stop people from thinking, from creating, from acting or reacting in favour of their own imaginative minds (Doyce's case is the most explicit).

In the games shown above, we perceive that, through their fabrication, the deceivers/fabricators either targeted an individual or the whole of society in order to play their games, a fact that sets them into two distinct frames. On the one hand, Rigaud, Mrs Clennam and Miss Wade are directly or intimately linked to their victims, on the other, Mr. Merdle, The Patriarch and the

Circumlocution Office are indirectly linked to those they exploit, which gives them a more detached approach to their evildoings. However, in both frames it can be observed that characters almost achieved their aims, for a “frame reversal” occurs and they suffer a downfall, as will be analysed below. These “games” can be seen in Graphics XXIV and XXV, page 186.

1.6.1.2. Lower Hierarchy Games

In opposition to the level of hierarchy analysed above, on the lower levels of society we find characters who are subordinate (with the exception of Rigaud) to those mentioned above but who assume here a different role and become themselves the masters of others.

Rigaud Blandois, in his villainous game, rules both sides of Society, for here the target of his mastery is *Cavalletto*. This relationship is established at the beginning of the novel, as said before, where their places within the prison cell are clearly marked. Apart from this arrangement in the cell, Rigaud adopts a master-like attitude and Cavalletto even submits to his outrageous behaviour, for he only calls Rigaud “master”. Although we observe that Cavalletto is not entirely submissive to Rigaud (as when he runs away from him), this master-servant attitude is still perceived at the end of the novel and it occurs in their final meeting at Arthur’s room, in the Marshalsea prison. Cavalletto’s personality induced him to be mastered as much as Rigaud’s induced him to master people around him, but their relationship is one which hints at all the other master-servant relationships in the novel.

This type of relationship is also observed between *Jeremiah* and *Affery* (and, indirectly, *Mrs Clennam*), for he tried to control Affery’s behaviour as much as her mind. Flintwinch had a very peculiar way of controlling these two women, for he always promised Affery “a dose” (fortunately it never came) and always tried to persuade her that she had been dreaming, when she had not

been; Mrs Clennam, in turn, was controlled through his knowledge of her affairs and of the secret in relation to Arthur's birth and the Dorrits. In this way, he managed to keep his mastery by ruling the house until it collapsed.

Mr. Dorrit also developed his mastery over *the inmates* of the Marshalsea, which reflects a frame reversal and his desire to keep a position for his family within the prison walls. The hypocrisy of his behaviour is only forgiven or forgotten if we consider his nature, that of a weak man who tries to deceive himself about the condition he is in. This dominating behaviour is reinforced by the title he gains in the prison—The Father of the Marshalsea—and by the testimonials he receives while living there. This smallscale exploitation of those who had less than him can also be compared to the Patriarch's behaviour in relation to the Bleeding Hearts, for he also played the father-figure and squeezed those who could hardly support themselves.

Pancks also had his share as a master while collecting rents from *the Bleeding Hearts*, something that was very much in tune with his alliance with Mr. Casby. Pancks also had to play the master because he was in charge of the worst part of the job, that of directly "squeezing" the Bleeding Hearts, something easy to achieve since they were constantly threatened with being made homeless.

The most amazing kind of mastery detected in the novel is that between *the Chief Butler* and *Mr. Merdle*, as this is a psychological type of mastery. As seen from the scenes in which they are together and from the Chief Butler's reaction when Mr. Merdle dies, the former can be said to play the role of the consciousness which perceived Mr. Merdle's weakness and threatened him with his silent observation.

The relationship between masters and mastered differs from that observed in the higher hierarchy, for here games were created and employed in order to impose a pattern of submissive response and behaviour in those

contained in it. However, in the same way that deceivers/fabricators find their downfall, masters also experience a reversal in their frame of action, as will be seen below. These games can be seen in Graphics XXVI and XXVII, page 187.

1.6.2. The Result of the Games: Frame Reversal

Here we will analyse the *characters' frame reversal*, that is, how they are affected by their “new” fortune and what it means in terms of their interaction, inner development, and above all what is behind this frame reversal, what it implies in terms of the social aspect of the story, what it can be related to in terms of the author’s criticism and the way he handled the various problems of the society of his time.⁶⁸

The *reversal* is a process through which characters are put in “check” by the author. Not only are their deceitful plans destroyed, but they are reduced to the vulnerability to which individuals are prone, no matter what place they have in society. This vulnerability is closely linked to the idea that their manipulative behaviour is sooner or later outweighed by a certain weakness or the assumption that their mischievous plan would never be discovered or discredited by those contained in it.

The frame reversal we perceive in the novel marks the end of all the games imposed on Society and on the individuals. Dickens seems to have wanted to build up a structure whose own “crutches” would not be able to support it for too long. The act of breaking free, of revery and rebellion are the very signs of such weakness, of the vulnerability of society in relation to the individual’s will.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See Dillon’s comments on the representation of Victorian social classes in the novel (DILLON, S. “The Archeology of Victorian Literature.” *MLQ* 54 (June 1993):255).

⁶⁹ Armstrong states that, in novels like *Little Dorrit*, “the hierarchical principles of society seem at first to operate counter to the interests of order, making it necessary to reform them,” hence the need of a frame reversal. (ARMSTRONG, N. “History in the House of Culture - Social Disorder and Domestic Fiction in Early Victorian England.” *Poetics Today*. 7 (1986):660).

When characters change their social status in the novel there is a “frame reversal” which affects characters’ earlier function within it: how they were introduced in Book I, “Poverty,” how they relate to each other, and the effects of this relationship on the development of the story as a whole.

As already seen in Book I, characters are presented in a very clear-cut arrangement according to their social status. The Dorrits had already had their first “frame reversal,” as we can gather from their history inside the Marshalsea prison, which was depicted in Mr. Dorrit’s incongruous, snobbish behaviour during this first part of the story. Apart from that, the frame formed by the Barnacles, the Merdles and the Circumlocution Office people—and the other frame formed by Rigaud Blandois, Mrs Clennam, Jeremiah and the Patriarch—also show a well-defined higher position in Society, a position as clear as the lower one of the inmates and the Bleeding Hearts.

However, it takes the reader time to notice that there is a “machinery in motion” and that these higher positions are soon to be changed for lower ones as several events foreshadow the frame reversal:⁷⁰ *Pancks* gathering mysterious information about the Dorrits’ ancestors and a fortune that might be theirs somewhere; *The Clennams*’ house “cracking” throughout the story and the twelve, gigantic crutches will not stand upright for very long. Moreover, the House (the business) is not the same any longer, as Arthur points out; even *Jeremiah*, with his “keen” eyes, does not notice that Affery’s dreams are filling her mind with too much forbidden information and that it might burst sooner or later. *The Merdles* have their days counted by Mr. Merdle’s “taking himself into custody” every day, behaviour that highlights his shadowy enterprises. *The shoal of Barnacles*, with their hands on Society, also seem to be approaching

⁷⁰ According to Leitch, *Little Dorrit* is an “insistently end-oriented [novel. It is] doubly prophetic: [it incorporates] both diagnostic predictions—that is, pathologies of society through mordant prognoses of its likely development—and prescriptive visions of the future. Dickens’s social diagnosis is made manifest through a prophetic plot which shows what the world of English society is by predicting what it is coming to” (LEITCH, T.M. “Closure and Teleology in Dickens.” *Studies in the Novel*. 18 (Summer 1986):149).

the end of their glorious days through Arthur and Doyce's partnership, which will bring new light and a broader horizon to Doyce's inventions. *The Patriarch*, with his "benevolent" behaviour, does not perceive that the "steam-engine" that tugs him and his "squeezing" business might turn in the wrong (or right) direction at any moment and change the fortune of the *Bleeding Hearts*. Moreover, *Blandois Rigaud Lagnier*, this "three-dimensional" entity, does not notice that the rules of his "game" are also being indirectly affected by the saint-like Cavalletto (p.745). Therefore, we have a series of hints which help us to grasp the work of the inward force that makes this "frame reversal" take place in the second part of the novel, as seen in Graphics XXVIII, XXIX, XXX and XXXI, pages 188, 189, 190 and 191.

However, this frame reversal will not last long, for after Chapter XXV, in Book II, a second "frame reversal" starts when Mr. Merdle's suicide takes place, as seen in Graphic XXXII, page 192. Society suffers its downfall and those who trusted the "Great Merdle" lose everything. In terms of characters' behaviour, Arthur was the one most affected by this reversal of fortune (except for Fanny and Mrs Merdle, of course), for this climax in his life would be the trigger for an inner development. The consequences of Arthur's experience in prison and Little Dorrit's impoverishment explain a third "frame reversal" which we see at the end of the novel, when "freedom" is finally won by Arthur and Little Dorrit, in Graphic XXXIII, page 192.

Apart from the Merdle business we still have some other independent "frame reversals": the one suffered by Mrs Clennam, Jeremiah, and Blandois when the house collapses and their "game" is over. Here, the frame formed by the secret is broken and, consequently, Mrs Clennam becomes physically and psychologically free; Jeremiah "disappears" with the house and Rigaud dies owing to his evil ambition. Miss Wade's game is also destroyed, for Tattycoram rebels and breaks free from her evil influence. Mr. Casby's patriarchal

“dictatorship” is also ended through Pancks’s outburst, which breaks their “squeezing” partnership and leads to the return of the Bleeding Hearts to their initial condition, although they are freed from their patriarchal landlord. Finally, Daniel Doyce’s ingenuity is acknowledged outside England, which frees him from the winding game of the Circumlocution Office.

In dealing with the characters’ “games” we managed to show those characters who were tightly linked to the dénouement of the mystery and to the manipulating activity which permeates the novel, those whose behaviour gave us all the elements to perceive not only their game but the way other characters take it.

A further point to be made about these two levels of deception and mastery is that all the game-frames are broken at some point, and here we find one of the most important characteristics of the pattern of structures used in the novel. By breaking these frames Dickens was symbolically breaking the frames through which the individual was bound by Society, for all the deceivers/fabricators and masters in the novel find their end in unexpected ways, and this end represents the freedom the individual seeks, no matter how unimportant he is to his Society.

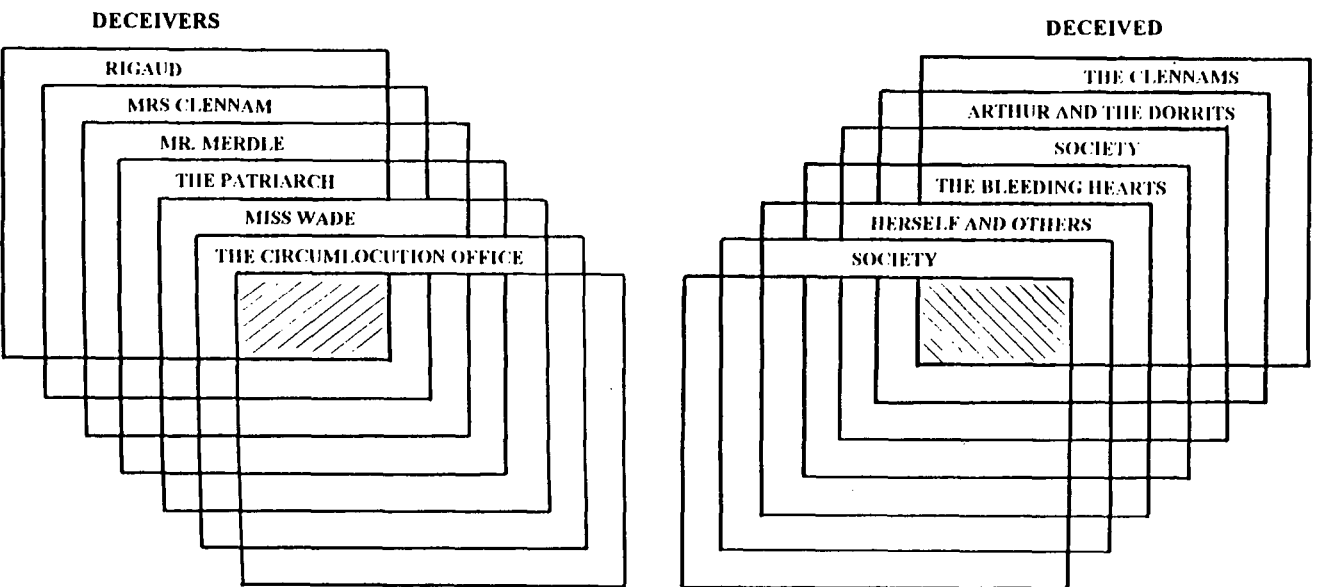
Thus, the “result of the game” leads us to the “merging” of these two societies where “rulers” and “ruled” acquire a balanced position in relation to each other, as seen in Graphic XXXIV, page 193. This “union” is characterized by Arthur’s and Little Dorrit’s marriage which represents, at the surface level of the analysis, the interrelationship of these two hierarchical levels, as seen in Graphic XXXV, page 194.

Through the games played by characters, through their behaviour in relation to one another, we could perceive the author’s own behaviour towards the reader. This means that the countless “game” images used in the novel, from its first chapter, show us that Dickens might not have wanted just to show how

the fabric of life is woven but how we readers can take the game he was disguisedly proposing in order to guide our apprehension of the novel.

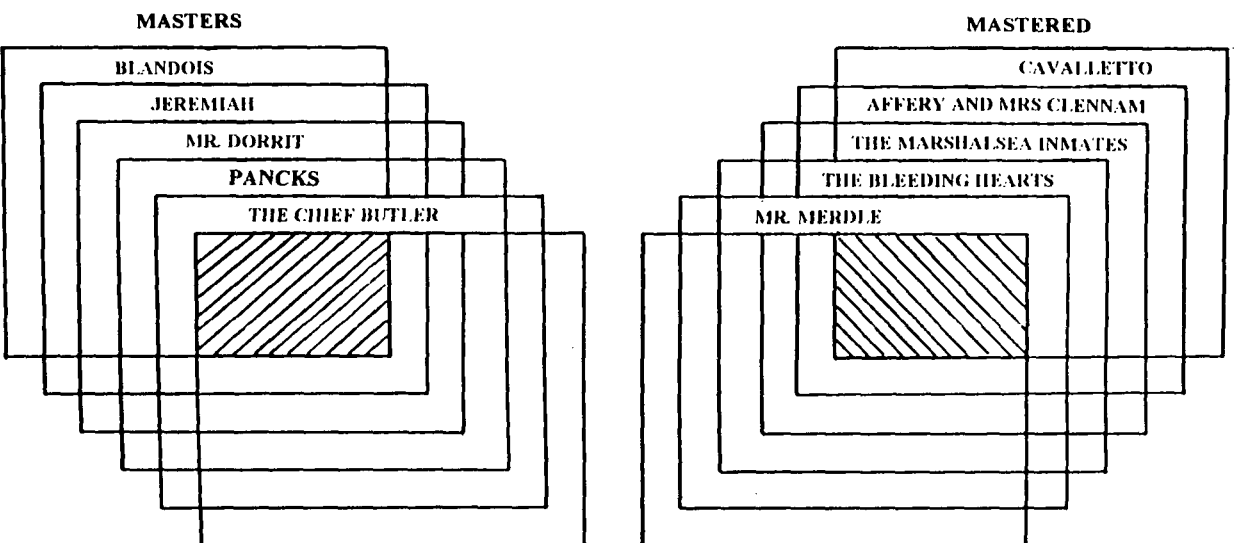
GRAPHICS XXIV AND XXV

- Higher Hierarchy Games - Deceivers and Deceived



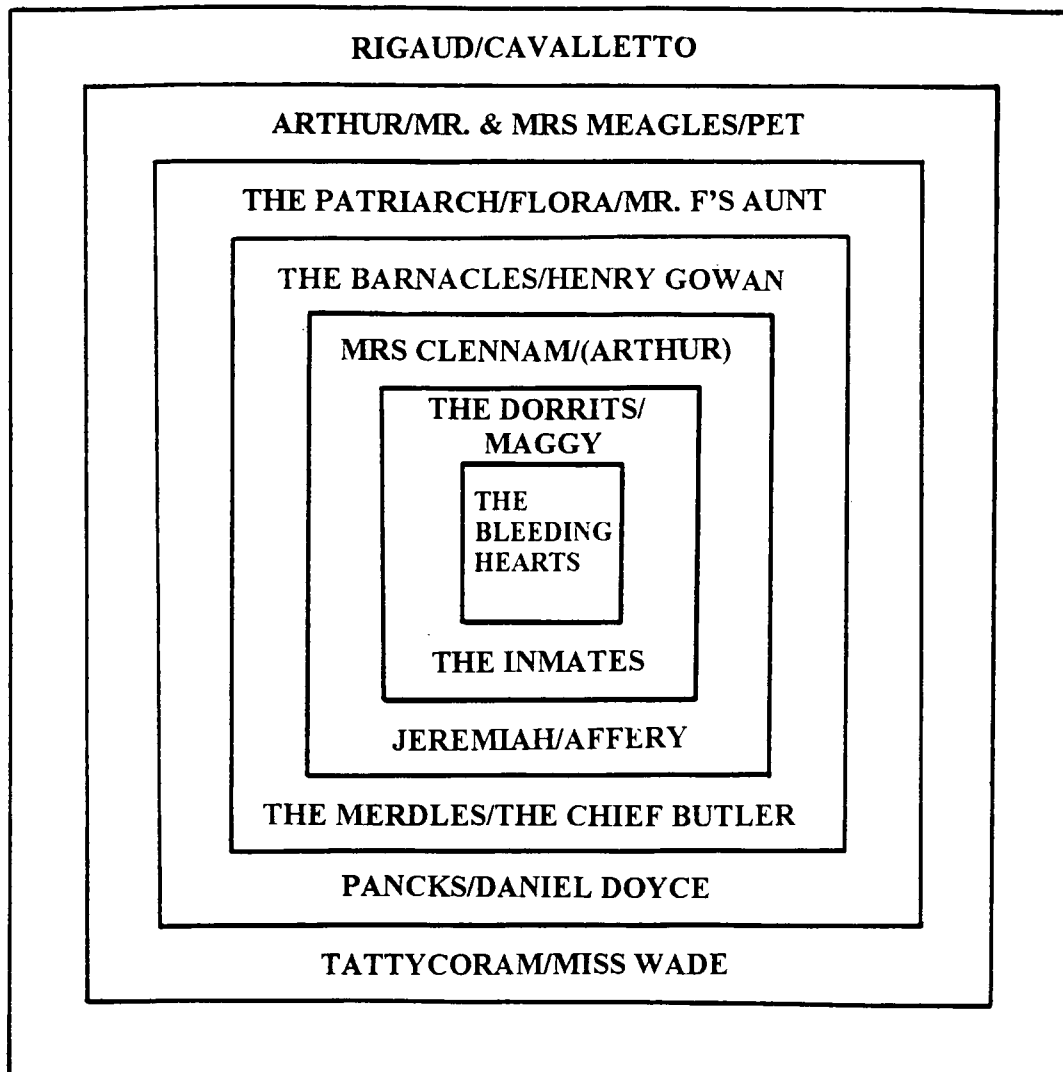
GRAPHICS XXVI AND XXVII

- Lower Hierarchy Games - Masters and Mastered



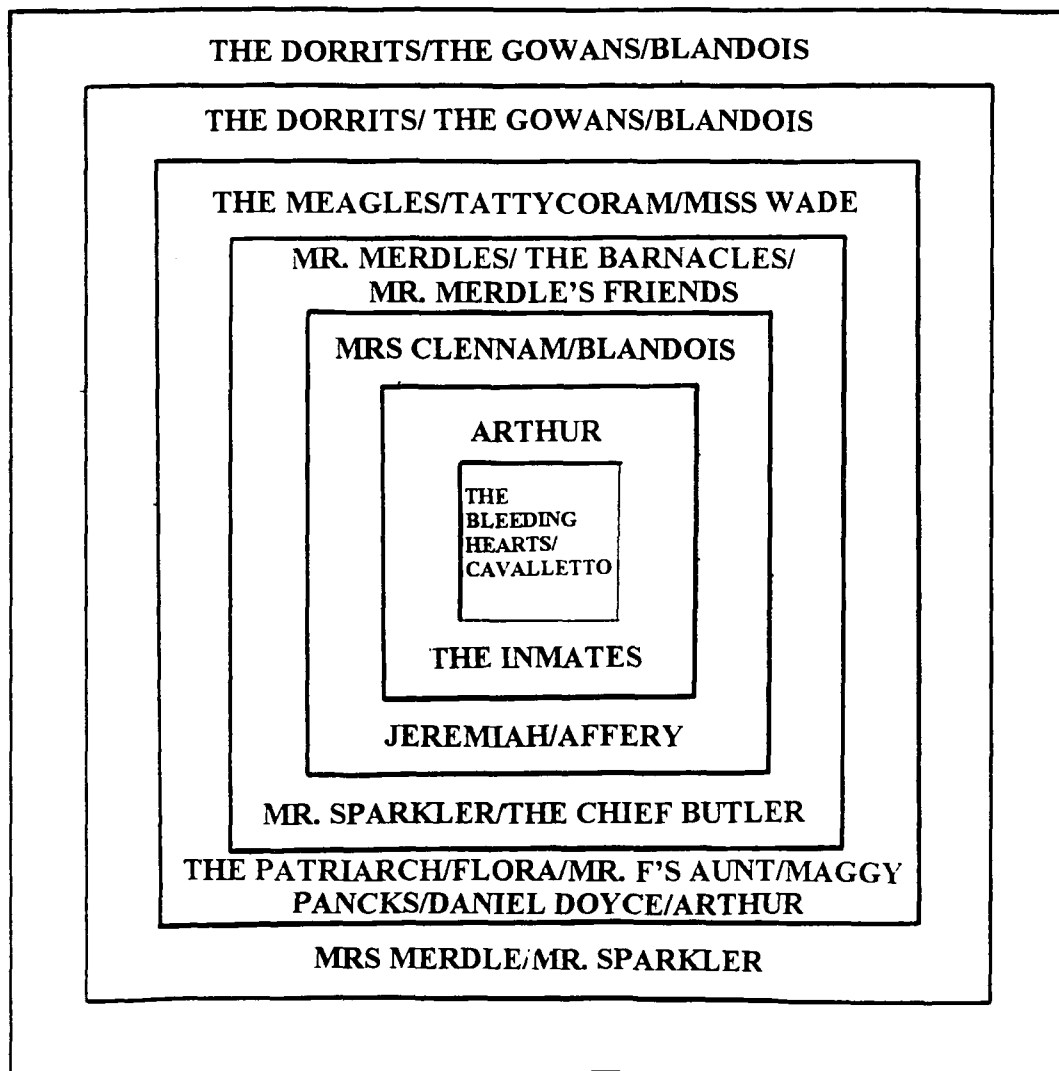
GRAPHIC XXVIII

Characters in Book I



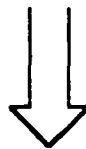
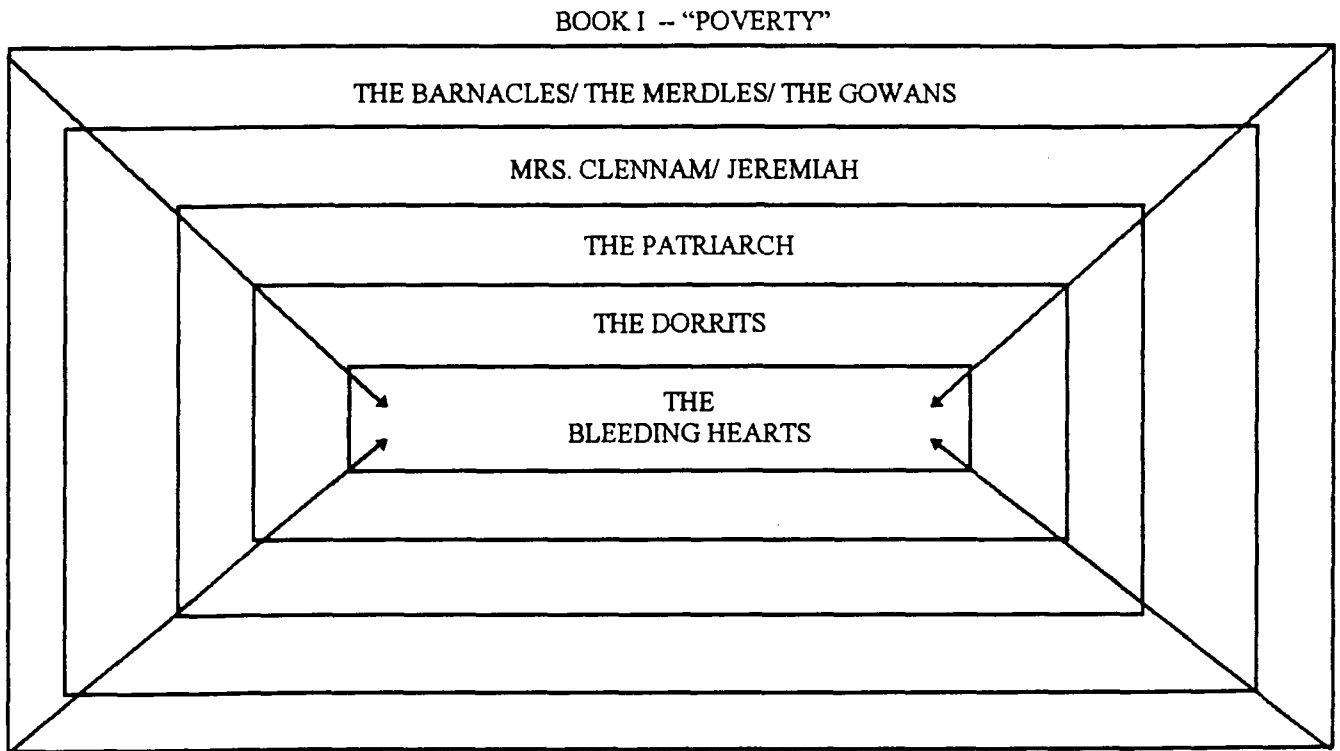
GRAPHIC XXIX

Characters' Frame Reversal (1) - Characters in Book II



GRAPHIC XXX

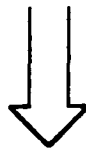
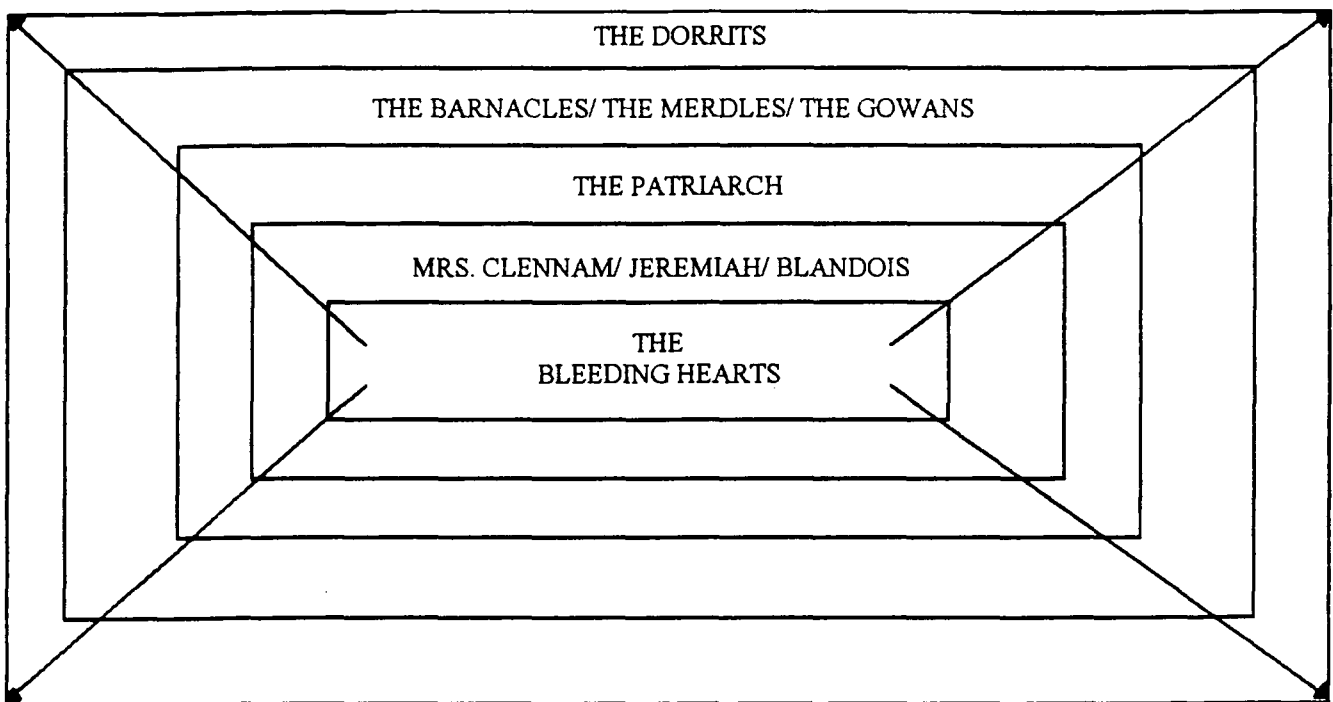
Characters' Frame Reversal (1a) - Book I - "Poverty"



GRAPHIC XXXI

Characters' Frame Reversal (2)

- At the Beginning of Book II - "Riches"

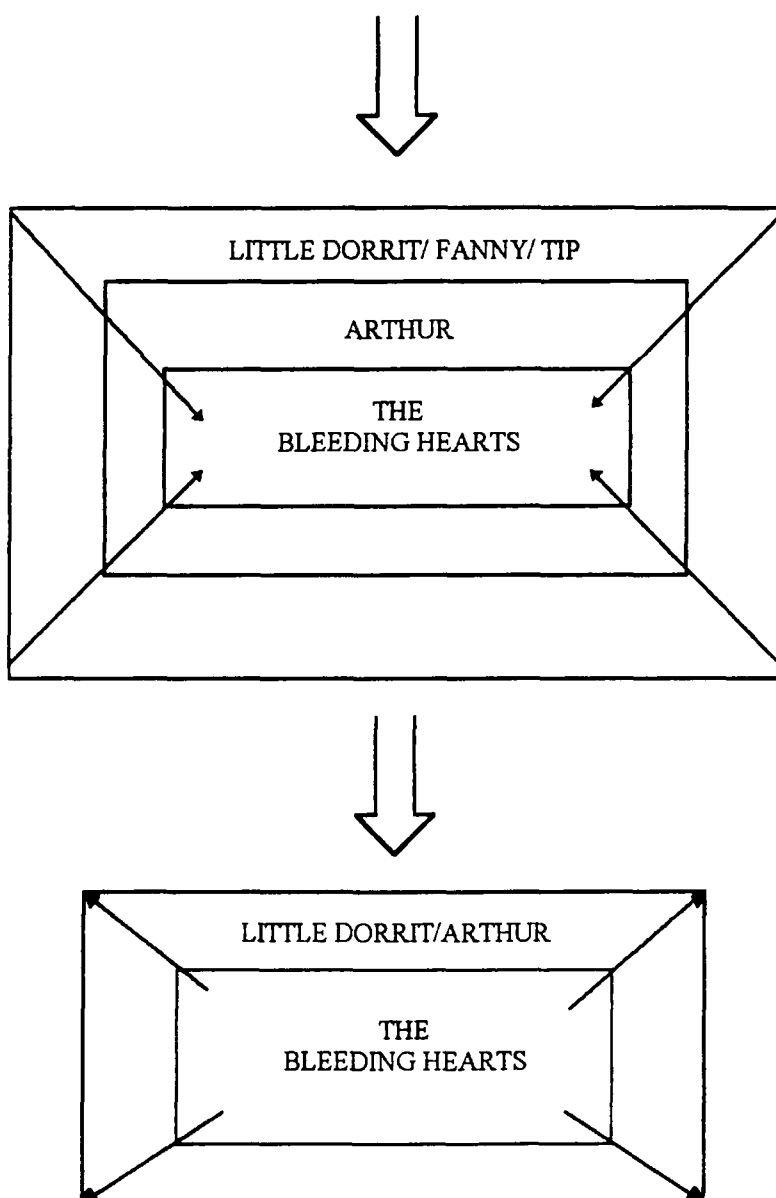


GRAPHICS XXXII AND XXXIII

Characters' Frame Reversal (3 and 4)

- Almost at the End of Book II

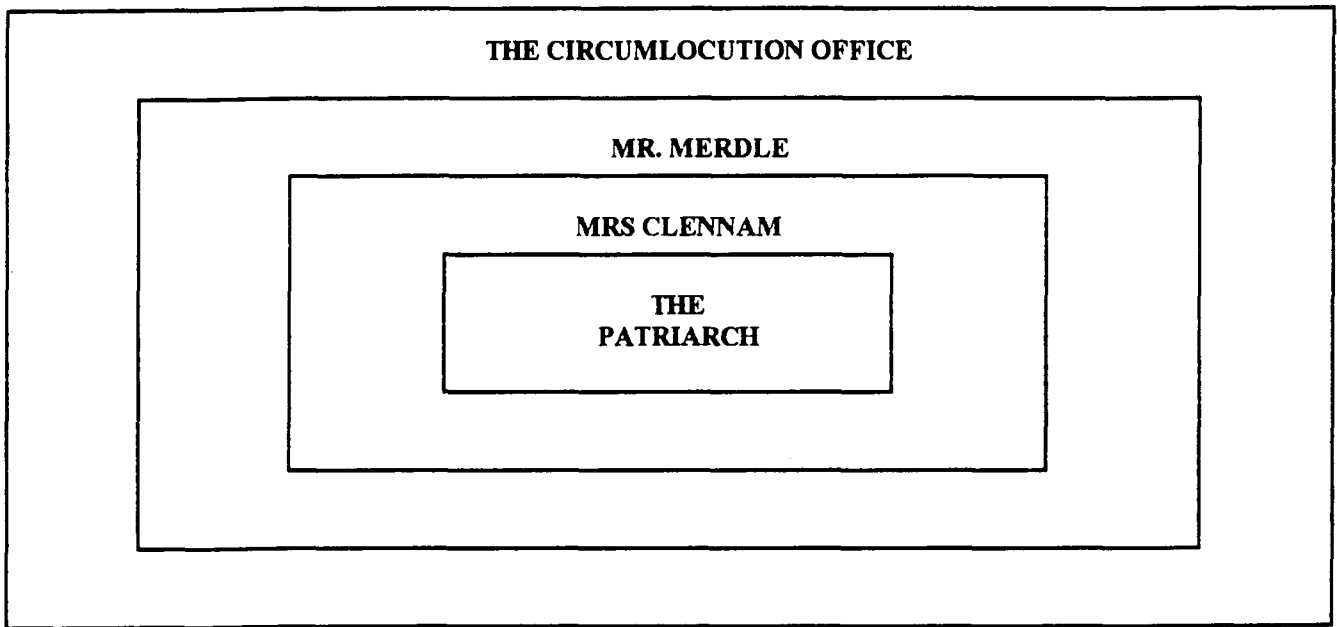
“Poverty” again and, then, “Freedom”



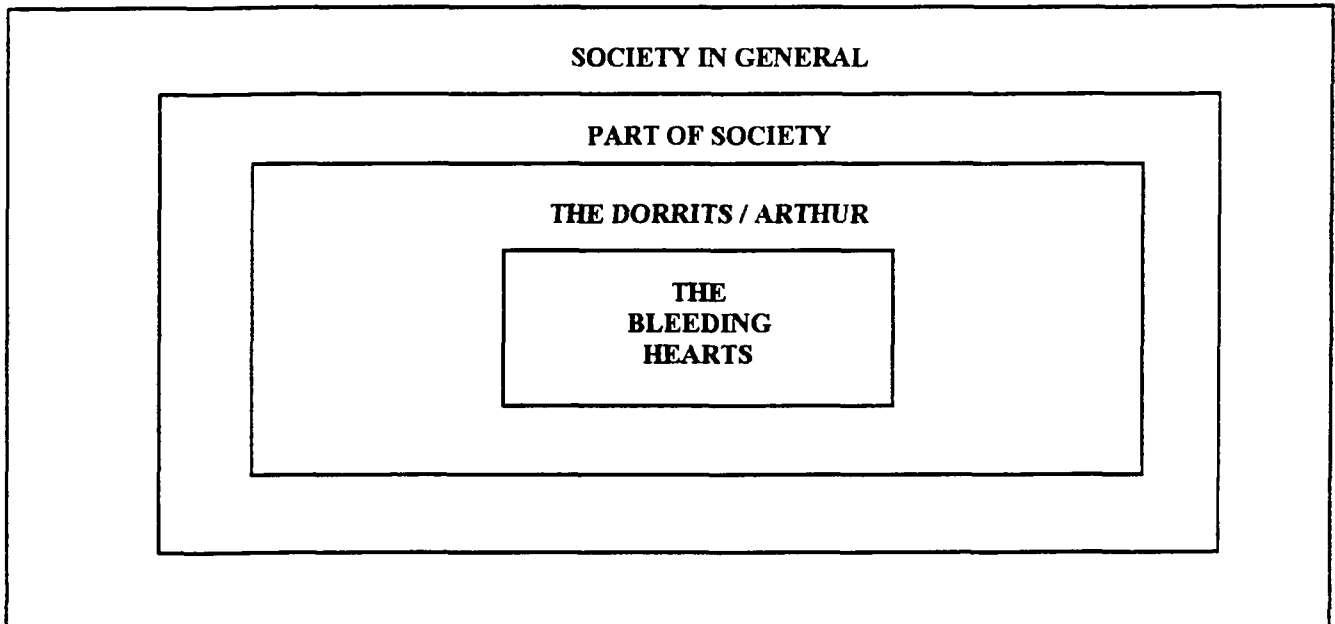
GRAPHIC XXXIV

Characters' Frame Reversal - The Merging of Two Societies

RULERS

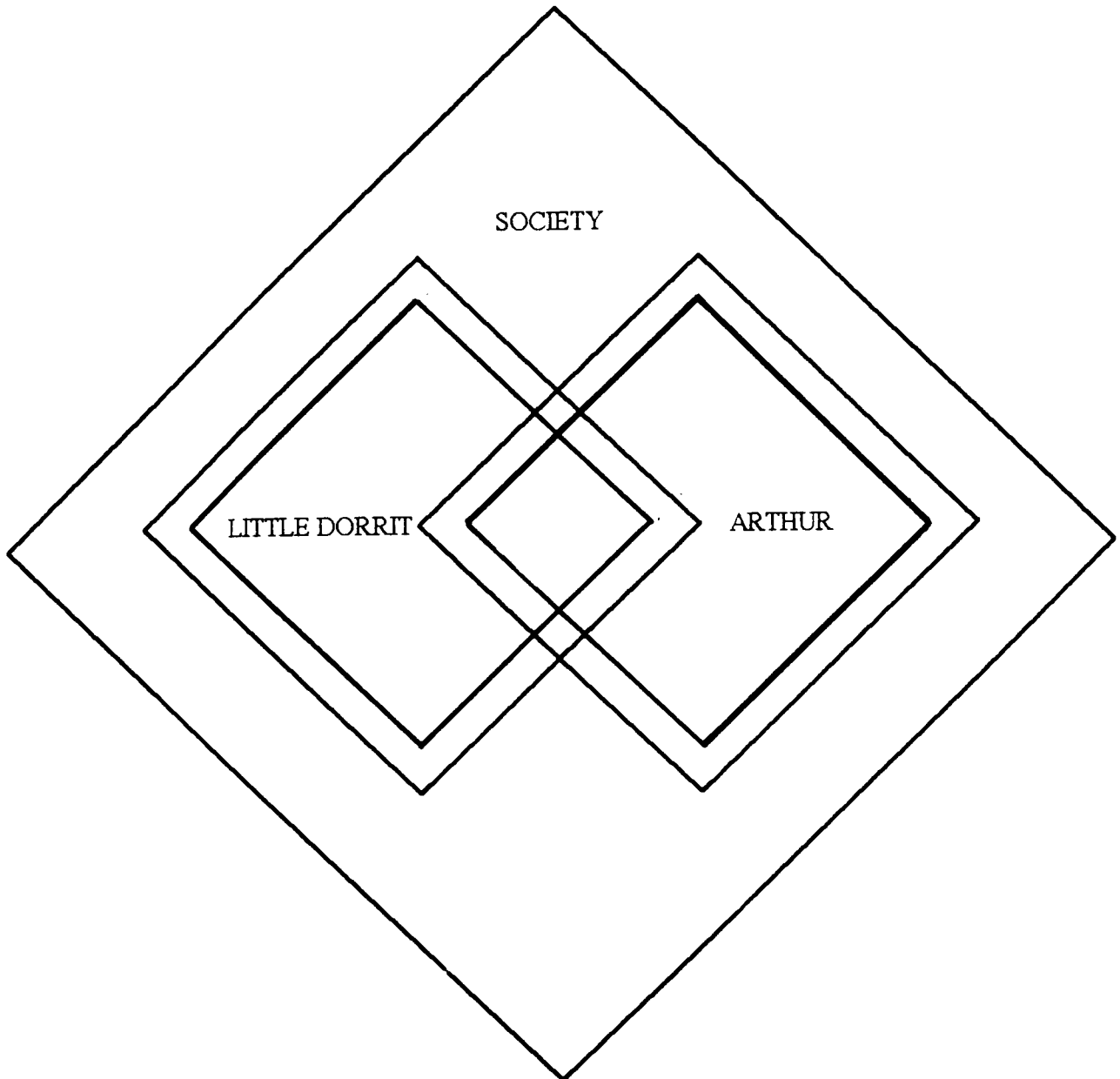


RULED



GRAPHIC XXXV

The Result of the Games



CHAPTER II

2. Metaphorical Frames: Duality as a Compositional Device

To make sense of the world, we must penetrate its incoherent surface and lay bare its deep structures; we must grasp not its hidden meanings but its inner workings.

Gerald L. Bruns¹

Bruns' remarks state an important aspect of our analysis of *Little Dorrit*, which is "to lay bare its deep structures [in order to] grasp its inner workings". However, our study also goes towards its "hidden meanings," towards what is achieved by the author within the deeper structure of the novel and what is also accomplished by the reader in his interpretation of the story.

Here we will be dealing with the *metaphorical function* of the literal frames established above and the way this function is related to the *deeper level* of the novel. We will show how *duality* is

a basic quality of all natural processes in so far as they comprise two opposite phases or aspects. When integrated within a higher context, [...it] generates a *binary system* based on the counterbalanced forces of two opposite poles. The two phases or aspects can be either *symmetrical* (or in other words identical in extent and intensity) or *asymmetrical*, successive or simultaneous. Instances of a duality of *successive phases* would be phenomena such as: day and night; winter and summer; [...] life and death [...] youth and old age. Example of duality which can be either *successive or simultaneous*: wet/dry; [...] positive/negative;

¹ BRUNS, G.L. "Introduction: 'Toward a Random Theory of Prose'." In SHKLOVSKY, V. *Theory of Prose*. Trans. by Benjamin Sher. USA: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991.

sun/moon; [...] round/square; fire/water; volatile/fixed; spiritual/corporeal [...], etc.²

The “binary system” created by the idea of duality is what allows us to use it as a compositional device in the *inner compositional frame* of the novel, for the dual forces perceived in the story—the negative and the positive—are clearly expressed in terms of “symmetry” and “asymmetry”. The opposed elements we find in the story are used in terms of *structure*—the two parts of the novel; *plot*—the two leading stories; *characterization*—the two frames of major and minor characters and their physical and psychological traits; *perspective*—the external and internal variations within the omniscient point of view; *space*—positive and negative chronotopes; *time*—the interrelationship between past and present and *action*—the interaction between fabricators and victims, with their consequent games of deceivers/deceived and masters/mastered.

Cirlot’s idea about this “binary system” can be complemented by Hutchinson’s emphasis on it, for:

The reader’s task in this form of game is to recognize the structural principle; having grasped this, he can speculate on its development. Thus the introduction of, say, a new positive element will encourage us to anticipate its negative counterpoint. Rather than thinking in terms of parallels, we must think of *binary forms* of development.³

The “binary form of development” found in *Little Dorrit*, is, structurally and thematically, represented, for the dual form of the narrative is a type of “inverted” parallel, that is, “setting of different ideas or themes or styles against one another, or opposing characters who embody different ideas”.⁴

² CIRLOT, J.E. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. United States: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993, p.24, my italics.

³ HUTCHINSON, p.30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.29.

Opposing ideas are demonstrated through individual self-imprisonment versus freedom; religion against total skepticism, dream versus reality.

The idea denoted by “binary forms” can be reinforced by the symbolic meaning of the number “two,” for it

stands for echo, reflection, conflict and counterpoise or contraposition; or the momentary stillness of forces in equilibrium; it also corresponds to the passage of time—the line which goes from behind forward; [...] it is also regarded as ominous for it connotes shadow [...] or dualism in the sense of the connecting-link between the immortal and mortal, or of the unvarying and the varying [...] of the good and evil, life and death.⁵

The relevance of this definition lies in the fact that it provides us with the idea of “equilibrium,” which controls the relationship established between the pairs of opposition in the story. Structural elements are set in “contraposition” within their specific frames and their thematic function is achieved through the analysis of the “dualism” embodied in them. Moreover, we can perceive the relevance that the idea of echo/conflict has to the novel through the fact that “in symbolism, numbers are not merely the expressions of quantities, but idea-forces, each with a particular character of its own”.⁶

In this sense, in order to perceive the meaning of the “metaphorical function” of frames, we have to consider, first of all, how the various functions of the literal frames are intrinsically related to the metaphorical level to be studied in this chapter. Here lies the fundamental point which will help us to explain the relevance of the frame analysis of the structural and thematic elements in *Little Dorrit*.

The correlation of “literal frames” and “metaphorical frames” might seem incongruous. However, it shows how these two types of “structures,” the

⁵ CIRLOT, J.E. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. USA: Barnes and Noble Books, 1993, p.232.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.230.

literal and the metaphorical, not only stand side by side in the novel but also complete each other's role and meaning—thus the need to relate them to the surface level of the narrative and to the deep level, respectively, for here we find the basis for the understanding of their function as controlling devices.

Our assumption is that both frame systems—literal and metaphorical—are employed by the author in order to build up and to reinforce the “game-like” characteristic he attributes to his work. The game structure perceived in the novel would require the reader to commit himself to both levels of identification, surface and deep, in order to fulfil its function, to play the author's intentional “trick” on him. That intention can be clearly perceived in Rigaud's words to Arthur: “I played my game to the end in spite of words; [...] You want to know why I played this little trick [...]?” (p.745). This is a statement which can be traced back to both the narrator and the character, for both play this “trick,” the former in relation to the reader and the latter in relation to his companions in the story. Rigaud's question is intended directly for Arthur and indirectly for us readers. Moreover, Rigaud's emphasis on his “wordplay” shows the intrinsic connection of the two levels of analysis we will explore here as, on the one hand, we have the “word” and its *literal* meaning, and, on the other hand, we have its *metaphorical* meaning, one completing the function of the other.

Our next step, then, is to analyse the “inner compositional frames” of the novel and trace the metaphorical function of their elements.

2.1. Inner Compositional Frames

The building up of the “metaphorical frames” is achieved through the analysis of the way duality occurs at the deeper level of the narrative, how it regulates and modifies the way structural elements are to be regarded.

As Cirlot emphasizes,

*the mystery of duality, which is at the root of all action, is manifest in any opposition of forces, whether spatial, physical or spiritual. The primordial pairing of heaven and earth appears in most traditions as an image of primal opposition, the binary essence of natural life. As Schneider has observed, the eternal duality of nature means that no phenomenon can ever represent a complete reality, but only one half of reality. Each form has its analogous counterpart: man/woman; movement/rest; evolution/involution; right/left—and total reality embraces both. A synthesis is the result of a thesis and an antithesis. And true reality resides only in the synthesis. This is why in many individuals, there is a psychological tendency towards ambivalence, towards the breaking down of the unitary aspect of things, even though it may prove to be a source of most intense suffering.*⁷

The mystery involving duality expressed here, the element responsible for its “binary essence,” is what we want to emphasize at the deeper level of the story. Duality will be considered as a leading force and will work for the building up of tension, of mystery and of the relationship of the various elements in it. Duality as a compositional device will enable us to scrutinize the intrinsic and hidden parts of the labyrinthine world of the novel in such a way as to observe better their superficial meaning and what is kept hidden behind it.

In the novel, this mystery pertaining to duality is also reinforced through the employment of the challenging *paradox*, for it “[consists] in something which is justified by its proponent, but which runs counter to accepted opinion or counter to common sense”.⁸ The paradox also works as a structuring device, for it sustains the game-like pattern of opposites found in the novel. Dickens makes use of contrasting ideas in order to provide the reader with the means to speculate, to search and scrutinize the various layers of meaning in the story and the way these layers are developed and complete each other.

⁷ CIRLOT, p.25, my italics.

⁸ HUTCHINSON, p.87.

Having stated the importance of duality and its “binary essence,” we will analyse the metaphorical function of structural elements. This will be done through the symbolism employed in the novel. As Hutchinson emphasizes, symbols “aim to suggest—by an indirect means—an idea, a relationship or an emotion. [...They] function both as “enigmas”⁹] and “parallels” [...and] commonly [rest] at the interpretative center of the work, and [their] role must clearly be grasped before the reader can derive the full implications of the story”.¹⁰ Symbols are an intrinsic part of the narrative structure of *Little Dorrit*, for they establish different “frames” of references. This occurs because “the symbols [...] assist our understanding of inner states of mind; they hint and reveal; they link parts of the book; they increase the sense of irony; and finally, they heighten our attention to detail, encouraging us to search further for other levels of significance”.¹¹ In this sense, each time a symbol is employed the reader’s imagination and desire to seek its meaning and function is triggered off, which is the main point of the “game” proposed by the author.

Moreover, Hutchinson states that

often it is only in retrospect that symbolic value will be recognized, and the reader will then strive to relate his new insight to the circumstances surrounding the initial appearance of the symbol. Sometimes it will be the recurrence of an image which prompts us to consider it on the symbolic plane; on other occasions it may be excessive details, or strangeness, or the object (event, etc.) will be allowed to stand out in some other way, such as by the ambiguous language in which it is described.¹²

⁹ According to Hutchinson, “the most popular game of concealment and suppression which is based on a form of guessing game, in which the author invites the reader to play in the manner to which he is long since accustomed. That reader will expect false clues, surprising twists, deception by the author as much as by the characters, but he will nevertheless accept such a situation [...] since the joy of winning against such odds, [...] affords an extra dimension of pleasure to that of the suspense” (HUTCHINSON, p. 24).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.115.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.118.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.117.

Duality is first perceived in the *structure* of the novel, which is split in “two” parts, Book I, “Poverty” and Book II, “Riches”. In this division we have established firstly the “binary form of development” of all structural elements, and secondly the metaphorical pair of opposition—poverty and riches—which rules the other thematic elements of the story. The basis for maintaining the “equilibrium” of the story is presented, which shows the hidden implication behind these two parts.

In terms of *story* and *plot*, we are presented with a story which introduces us to two opposing worlds—the Clennams’ and the Dorrits’. Consequently, this story is developed through a “double” plot line. At a deeper level, through the two families, the stories hint at the contrasting layers of society (higher/lower) which will control the development of the plot lines.

Duality in *characterization* is presented in several ways: firstly, by the frames of major and minor characters; secondly, through the presence of two protagonists; thirdly, through *similar doubles*: the allusion to Pet’s twin sister and Jeremiah’s mysterious double; and *opposing doubles*: the two men first introduced in the novel (Rigaud and Cavalletto), the two strikingly different brothers, William and Frederick, the two antagonistic sisters, Amy and Fanny, the two other identities adopted by Rigaud and the two opposing societies, as mentioned above. Apart from these pairs of opposition we also have *highly villainous characters* such as Rigaud, Jeremiah, Miss Wade, Henry Gowan, Fanny, Tip, Mr. and Mrs Merdle, the Barnacles and the Patriarch; *slightly villainous characters* such as Mrs Clennam and Mr. Dorrit, in contrast to *good characters*: Arthur, Little Dorrit, Affery, the Meagles, Tattycoram, Maggy, Pancks, Flora, Mr. F’s Aunt, Sparkler, Daniel Doyce, Cavalletto, the inmates and the Bleeding Hearts. Characters, then, are represented in such a way that the two leading forces controlling the story—good and evil—become clearly emphasized through their inner traits.

Characterization can also be regarded according to *colour symbolism*, for in the group of colours used in the novel we perceive the clash of two opposing forces: “warm “advancing” colours, corresponding to processes of *assimilation*, activity and intensity (*red* [...*brown, yellow*, later introduced], by extension *white*), and [...] *cold, “retreating” colours*, corresponding to processes of *dissimulation*, passivity and debilitation (*blue*, [...] by extension *black*), *green* [also, later introduced] being an intermediate, transitional colour spanning the two groups”.¹³ According to their characteristics, these contrasting groups of colours clearly emphasize the inner traits of those characters related to them: Rigaud is simultaneously portrayed in black and white; Cavalletto is pictured in red and brown; Mr. Merdle has a yellow face and the Patriarch is dressed in green.

Linked to characterization we can also mention the relevance of the use of *animal symbolism* which is, as emphasized by Cirlot,

of the utmost importance in symbolism, both in connexion with their distinguishing features, their movement, shapes and colours, and because of *their relationship with man*. [...] The symbolism of any given animal varies according to its position in the symbolic pattern, and to the attitude and context in which it is depicted. Thus the frequent symbol of the “tamed animal” can signify the reversal of those symbolic meanings associated with the same animal when wild.¹⁴

The bird which is used to “symbolize human souls [...and it is a symbol] of thought, of imagination and of the swiftness of spiritual processes and relationships,”¹⁵ is, paradoxically, used in the novel to refer to “men” as they are considered “caged birds” in the prison, as when Blandois calls Arthur

¹³ CIRLOT, p.52, my italics.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.10, my italics.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.28.

“brother-bird” (p.742), while *the parrot* is presented as a free being, whose “ideas” are expressed without any restraints.

The *perspective* employed in the story is also affected by duality, for the omniscient narrator “shares” his view with the two protagonists. This allows us to have an “objective” and a “subjective” perspective of the story, which means that we have a superficial and a deeper access to characters’ behaviour and consciousness.

Duality in *space* is represented in two ways: in *general* terms we have *landscape symbology*, which, as Cirlot emphasizes, “is the mundane manifestation of a dynamic complex which in origin was non-spatial. Inner forces are liberated to unfold as forms which disclose in themselves the qualitative and quantitative order of their inner tensions.”¹⁶ They are the city, streets, alleys, roads, countryside, foreign countries, sea and harbour. In more *specific* terms we have *space symbology*, which, according to Cirlot, represents

an intermediate zone between the cosmos and chaos. [Moreover, there is] the concept of space as a three-part organization based upon its three dimensions. Each dimension has two possible directions of movement, implying the possibility of two poles or two contexts. To the six points achieved in this way, there was added a seventh: the center; and space thus became a logical structure.¹⁷

Here we have *houses*, which are “strongly related to the human body and human thought,”¹⁸ hence the analogy between houses and their inhabitants. We also have *the Church*, which is *first* presented as a repressive, stern and threatening “entity,” in accordance with Mrs Clennam’s doctrine, *second* as a comforting and resting refuge for Little Dorrit and Maggy, and *third*, as a place of “unity” at the end of the novel.

¹⁶ CIRLOT, p.176.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.300.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.153.

The *prison* is among the main symbols of the novel. It is used to reinforce *firstly* the self-inflicted imprisonment of body and soul as in Mrs Clennam's case. *Secondly*, it shows contradictory self-deluding freedom, as in Mr. Dorrit's pretending to be free inside the Marshalsea (body seclusion versus apparent "freedom" of soul) and outside it, trying to adapt himself to life in society (freedom of the body versus the "restraint" of the soul). *Thirdly*, it highlights the individual's freedom despite confinement (in Cavalletto's case).

The staircase is used to indicate "communication between different vertical levels".¹⁹ It *first* appears at the prison, linking the "infernal hole" to the outside world; *second*, in Arthur's house where there are the "mourning tablets" of the staircase linking the ground floor to Mrs Clennam's bedroom, then, the staircase linking this same floor to the attic (on his arrival in the house Arthur performs an ascending movement until he reaches the "window," which represents the final link between the earthly world and heaven); *third*, in the Marshalsea, Mr. Dorrit's chamber is reached through a staircase, so that he is placed above the other inmates, and Little Dorrit's chamber is in the attic, coincidentally at the same level as Arthur's in Mrs Clennam's house, showing the level they occupy in the story. This group of symbols can be further complemented by the bridge, river, the gate of the prison, the prison yard and bed-chambers.

Within landscape and space we can include *the symbology of objects* contained in them, "[for] each object consists of a material structure with certain unconscious elements adhering to it. The fact that these forgotten or repressed constituents should reappear in a new medium—the object—enables the spirit to accept them in form different from the original".²⁰ Here we find *the church bells*

¹⁹ CIRLOT, p.312.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.239.

and their sound which is “a symbol of creative power,”²¹ although in the novel it is referred to as “maddening [...] with all degrees of dissonance” (p.28), which corroborates the chaotic and negative effect the church has on people; *the window*, which conveys “understanding, isolation [in the scene when Arthur is placed by the window and] consciousness, especially when placed at the top of the house or tower [in Arthur’s bedroom in his mother’s house and in Little Dorrit’s attic];”²² *the lock, key, games* (draught-board and dominoes, which symbolize the structure of the novel). These introductory symbols are further complemented by mud, watch, clock, portraits and clothes: Rigaud’s cloak which “on the one hand, [is] the sign of superior dignity, and, on the other, of a veil cutting off a person from the world”.²³

In terms of *action/interaction* we have the opposing forces of “fabricators and victims,” which strive to maintain their equilibrium throughout the story. The qualities inherent to characters in this division denote the dual forces which rule society. Therefore, at its deeper level, action mirrors the individual and the struggle he endures to maintain himself in society. The consequent games found in the character’s intentional activity, those of deceivers/deceived, masters/mastered, also emphasize the individual’s need to go against all odds and to try to impose a deceitful/authoritative behaviour on those he considers weaker or lower in relation to himself.

The analysis helped us to show how the novel was built and how the *structural* and *thematic* elements which offered contrast within it helped to form the basis for the literal and the metaphorical analysis we proposed here. These elements form, then, the various segments within a framework which was, first, on a *superficial level*, based on characters’ behaviour, their action and reaction

²¹ CIRLOT, p.24.

²² VRIES, Ad de, p.502.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.49.

towards one another, their relationship towards the environment they inhabited, the spatial and temporal sphere within which these characters interacted and the way through which they were presented to us. Second, at a *deeper level*, these elements were conveyed through the symbology embodied in them. In this sense, the literal and the metaphorical aspects of the representability of all these elements were combined in order to provide us with the means to apprehend the order and the idea that ruled them.

All the different meanings found in the pairs of opposite forces mentioned above worked in a way to show us how the story itself, with its twofold characteristic, was built in order to break all the conventions and all the rules of its time. The strength of the novel, the strength of a world which seemed so full of idiosyncrasies and missing links, lies in the fact that the reader is still able to find order in life, amid the chaos established by suicide, falling houses, unexpected imprisonments and deaths. The duality found in its meaning helped us to detect its two leading forces, that is, the *spiritual* and the *material*, one stated in the literal frame and the other in the metaphorical frame, hence their combination inside the novel.

On reading a novel such as *Little Dorrit*, our first thought is about the amount of information we are bombarded with. If we look closely at the text we perceive that Dickens is slowly casting his net over us, “preparing his game,” until we are deeply engulfed in it. If we consider the analysis shown above we might notice that there is much more than just chaos in *Little Dorrit*, and that its author had a very clear picture of what he wanted his contemporaries to perceive.²⁴ In analysing all those frameworks we notice that behind it all Dickens stated a very clear message, that is, the willingness and the power of the

²⁴ According to Calvino, “literature is [...] a game which at a certain stage is invested with an unexpected meaning, a meaning having no reference at the linguistic level on which the activity takes place, but which springs from another level and brings into play something on that other level that means a great deal to the author or to the society of which he is a member” (CALVINO, I. “Myth in Narrative.” In FOREMAN, R. *Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow*. Chicago: Swallow Press, 1981, p.79).

individual in relation to his society. The duality we find in the novel shows us that a controlling mind was guiding the reader throughout the turmoil of the amount of information offered him. The fight between contrasting forces is perceived through the individual's ambivalence, which can be clearly linked to Dickens's own tendency to oscillate between chaos and control²⁵ and the final breaking of the frame structure with which he encloses his characters. This tendency to "break down the unitary aspect of things" can be related to the conclusion that, inside the labyrinthine world of the novel, there is a unity which will be finally broken in order to allow the individual to achieve his own will against that imposed by society—the will to dominate the individual and his self. Thus, the frame structure of the novel not only helps us to perceive its organization better but it reveals to us another sphere within the novel. In the chaos we can find meaning and order, but an order which expresses more than just physical representation. It also expresses how labyrinthine life can be to the individual and the way he is able to react to it.

²⁵ GUERARD, A.J. *The Triumph of the Novel: Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, p.7.

CONCLUSION

Duality within Circularity

La estructura de la obra no es algo intrascendente o adventicio, ni algo caprichosamente impuesto a la realidad. Es un modo de verla (o de entenderla) para después contarla.

Oscar Tacca¹

By first considering and joining the literal meanings of the word *graphic*, which, as a qualifier indicates something *very clear and powerful*,² and as a noun means a *drawing*,³ we state a way to point out the basis for analysing the symbolic function of the graphics used in this work.

Our second step for showing the relevance of the use of graphics in the analysis of the novel lies in the fact that

there is perhaps greater symbolic significance in [graphic signs] than in any other aspect of symbolism, because of the clear intention behind them to express an explicit meaning. [Moreover,] the symbol as crystallized in creative art involves a high degree of condensation, deriving from its inherent economy of form and allusive power. This, then, is the psychological basis of the symbolism of graphics (the basis of the magical interpretation is to be sought in the literal interpretation of the theory of correspondences). [...] Any one given figure (with its series of multivalences—that is, embracing several meanings which are not irrelevant or equivocal) varies in appearance and in significance with the “rhythm-symbol” (that is, the idea and the intended direction) pervading it.⁴

¹ TACCA, O. *Las Voces de la Novela*. Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1989, p.11.

² PROCTER, p.619.

³ *Ibid.*, p.619.

⁴ CIRLOT, p.122-125.

Following Cirlot's comments, what concerns us here are the "explicit meanings" that are derived from graphics, for their incisive form implies a high degree of apprehension in terms of analysis. Our work relies on the power of the "rhythm-symbol" in order to create a visual and psychological effect which is based on the correspondence between the graphics and ideas contained in the literary text.

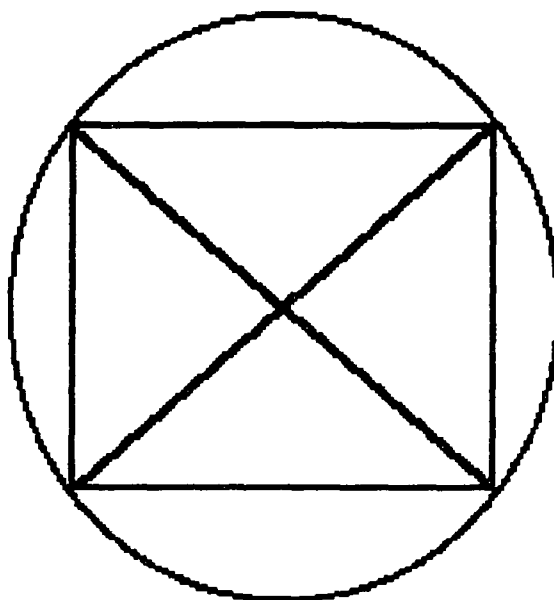
This explains how the graphics shown throughout this work expressed a way of synthesizing the meaning of each frame of structural elements identified in the novel. Therefore, the graphic below works as a conclusion to the other ones presented here, for it represents the two antagonistic forces which control the structural and thematic elements within the literal and metaphorical level of the novel.

Graphic XXXVI is the representation of "the sign of the conjunction of the quaternary (the cross [and] the square) with unity [which] is expressed through the union of the numbers four and one, that is, of the square ([and] the cross) and the circle".⁵ Thus, we have "two quaternaries—spiritual and material—within totality":⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.127.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.124.

GRAPHIC XXXVI

Duality within Circularity

In general terms, in this graphic we have the combination of the “square” which represents the “earth,” the material world and the “circle” which represents “heaven,” the spiritual world. “The aim of “circling the square” was to obtain unity in the material world (as well as in the spiritual life) over and above the differences and obstacles (the static order) of the number four and the four-cornered square”.⁷ In this sense, the joining together of these two forces gives us the exact meaning we need in order to demonstrate that these two worlds are combined within the novel. One world is represented by the *literal*, material frame and the other by the *metaphorical*, spiritual frame in which we find the significance of duality.

The significance of this graphic can be further shown through its specific definition, for it

⁷ CIRLOT, p.308.

expresses the original Oneness (symbolized by the centre), the “way out to the manifest world” (the four radii, which are the same as the four rivers which well up from the *fons vitae* or from the foot of the Cosmic Tree in Paradise), and the return to Oneness (the outer circumference) through the circular movement which “smooths away” the corners of the square (these corners implying the differentiation characteristic of the multiplicity and transitoriness of the world of phenomena). By adding a further cross, shaped like an X, to this figure, the wheel is obtained; and the wheel is the commonest symbol of the “Centre” and of the cycle of transformation.⁸

If we think in terms of correspondence between the graphic and the novel, the meaning and significance of the forms lie, first of all, in its resemblance to the “sun” which is one of the most powerful symbols in the novel, the “staring eye” above all; second, its regular and geometric shape denotes the organization of the novel in terms of structure which, at first analysis, seems “closed” inside itself; third, regarding its “spatial arrangement, [the intersecting lines which form] the St. Andrew’s cross”⁹—representing the “union of the Upper and Lower Worlds”¹⁰—are symbols of fall and ascent, respectively. Moreover, in a figure characterized by a centre with dual symmetry, there are two symbolic tendencies: first, an *inward* rhythmic movement which denotes concentration and also aggression; and secondly, *outward* rhythm towards the four cardinal points, indicating the defence of “wholeness”. This figure also denotes dispersion and growth, for lines are also means of communication between different zones. This is why the significance of lines and the nature of the zones they link must be equally judged.

Moreover, the importance of the graphic can be perceived through the symbolism of the number of its components. In this sense, we have the number “three” which provides us with the element which completes the symbolism of

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.127.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.130.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.268.

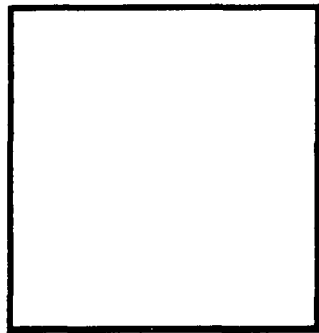
the graphic, for it stands for “spiritual synthesis, and is the formula for the creation of each of the worlds. *It represents the solution of the conflict posed by dualism.* [...] It is the harmonic product of the action of unity upon duality”.¹¹

The symbolic meanings of the material and the spiritual embodied in the graphic can be further scrutinized through the importance of its individual parts.

The *square*, here, symbolizes “the combination of four different elements. Hence, it corresponds [...] to all four-part divisions of any process [...] Psychologically, its form gives the impression of firmness and stability, which explains its frequent use in symbols of organization and construction”.¹² If we think in terms of the process of the organization and construction of the frames of structural elements of the novel, the four parts involving it can be divided into first, the definition of the structural elements; second, the function of these elements in the story, third, their effect in the development of the novel, and fourth, the breaking of the frame they represent. Moreover, in terms of the process of the organization of social interaction, it can be divided into first, the definition of what causes the character’s action, second the aim behind his action, third the practice of the action, and fourth, the result obtained through it. On the one hand we have the characters’ struggle to maintain the material side of their lives through secrets, social position, fortune and control over others, and on the other the passive behaviour of those who feel unable to go against oppression. In terms of the novel, the square also symbolizes the “society” in which the individual has to struggle, the physical boundaries which trap him.

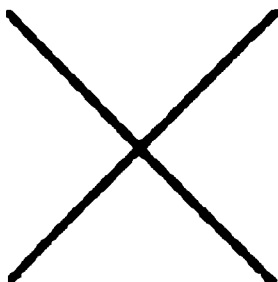
¹¹ CIRLOT, p.232, my italics.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.307.



Quaternary—material and passive.¹³

The *cross*, which is placed in the mystic Centre of the cosmos, represents the bridge, the ladder by means of which the soul may reach God. It establishes the relationship between the two worlds of the celestial and the earthly. It stands for the conjunction of opposites, joining the spiritual principle with the principle of the world of phenomena. It is “a symbol for [...] struggle”.¹⁴ Thus, the cross stands for the period in which characters, actively or dynamically, struggle for inward development in the novel, the period when changes occur in terms of acts of rebellion, unmasking and reversals, when the individual breaks free from his role as a victim and destroys his oppressors or deceivers. The cross also symbolizes the “individual,” the “spiritual, active and dynamic being” which struggles in society.



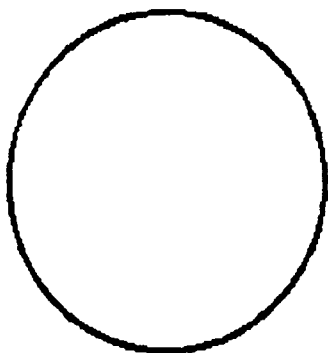
Quaternary—spiritual, active or dynamic.¹⁵

¹³ CIRLOT, p.122.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.69-70.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.123.

The *circle* is a “symbol of adequate limitation, of the manifest world, of the precise and the regular, as well as of the inner unity of all matter and all universal harmony”.¹⁶ The “harmony” symbolized by the circle represents what characters achieve at the end of the story, for, at this stage, the struggle between negative and positive forces reaches its end and the individual obtains inward growth and freedom. The circle also stands for the “world,” the universe which surrounds the individual and his society.



Infinity, the universe, the All.¹⁷

With the splitting of its parts, the graphic gathers a new dimension, one that makes us realize how it is built and how the combination of all these concepts—material/passive, spiritual, active or dynamic and infinity—leads to the understanding of its importance for the analysis of the novel.

In the combination of the parts of this graphic we were also able to identify the way the individual is represented within the world of the novel, that is, apart from the “condensation” of the meaning of the sets of opposite pairs analysed above, the graphic also helps us to analyse the trajectory the two protagonists covered during the novel. If we go beyond the boundaries of the graphic shown above we realize that the individual not only achieves a balance

¹⁶ CIRLOT, p.48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.123.

in relation to his inner and outside world, as happens to Arthur and Little Dorrit at the end of the novel, but he also achieves control in relation to his “free will” within the society in which he lives. Finally, the individual is able to seek his way towards completeness, towards what is beyond the boundaries which enclose him.

This search is represented through the phases of Arthur’s and Little Dorrit’s lives in the story. The spiritual growth both experience during the story is marked by their efforts to maintain an “outward” movement from the “centre” which represents their “negative” origins. This movement can be divided into three phases. In Arthur’s case, the first one is represented by his illegitimate birth; second, Arthur’s life is represented by his conscious or unconscious acts, for he “returns” home from exile and “frees” himself from the family’s business and from his mother’s control over him; third, he “grows,” inwardly, through his downfall and imprisonment. In this last phase, Arthur’s “metamorphosis” paradoxically occurs through his experiencing physical imprisonment in order to achieve spiritual freedom. In his case, metamorphosis means “transmutation,” for it occurs “in an ascending direction, carrying all appearances away from the moving rim of the Wheel of Transformations along the radical path to the “Unmoved mover”—the non-spatial and timeless Centre”.¹⁸

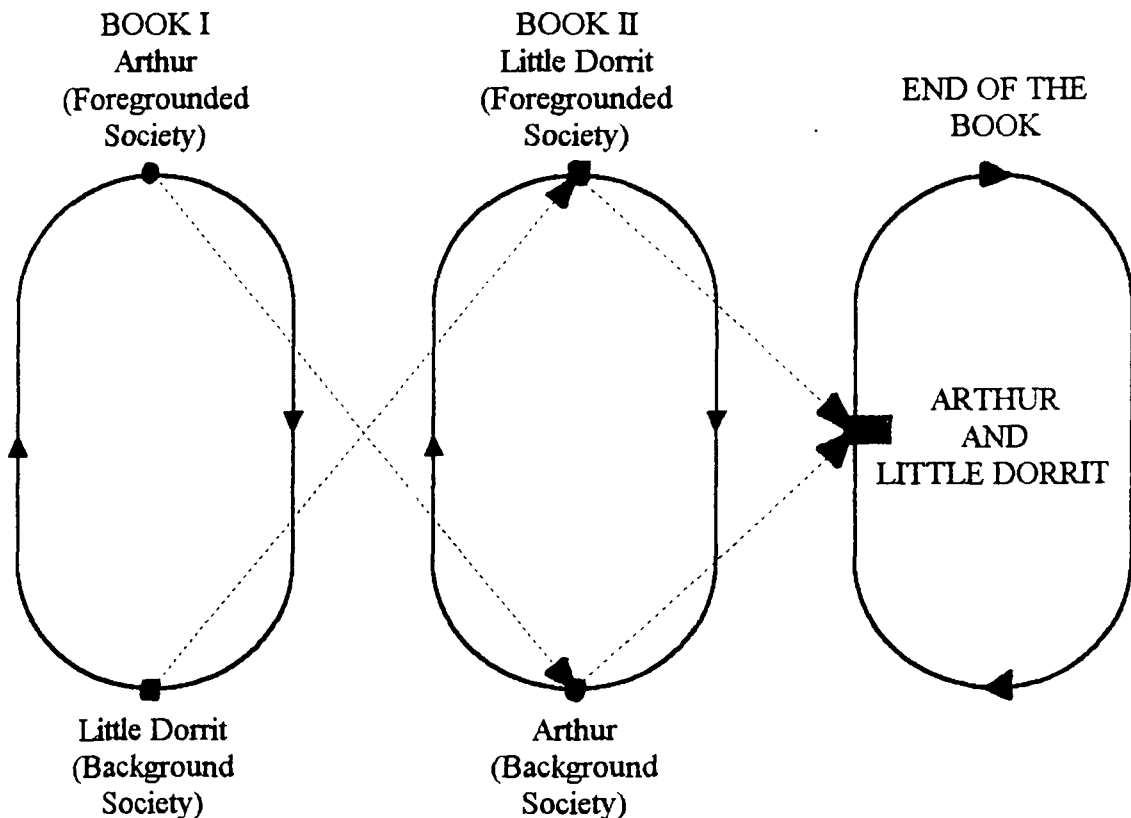
In Little Dorrit’s case, the phases of her life are represented by, first, her birth as a prison child, second, her *poor* and *active* life in and out of the Marshalsea prison, and third, her experience as a *rich* and *passive* person, which provides her with the inward struggle and desire to free herself from that unbearable “imprisonment”. Paradoxically, in her case, freedom meant going back to a poor and simple life, which came with the loss of her fortune and her re-encounter with Arthur.

¹⁸ CIRLOT, p.209.

These three phases in Arthur's and Little Dorrit's lives are also represented by the three parts of the graphic, as analysed above, which can be further related to the "three volumes" (p.826) containing Little Dorrit's life, as mentioned by the priest on her wedding day: the "first volume" registered her birth, the second witnessed her poor life at the Marshalsea, and the third registered her marriage to Arthur. Therefore, first we have a "passive phase," second a simultaneously passive and active one, and third a dynamic phase in which the characters achieve "wholeness". This can be seen, below, in Graphic XXXVII.

GRAPHIC XXXVII

The Three Phases of Life



Such phases are explained, for

the tendency of opposites to unite in a synthesis is always characterized by stress and suffering, until and unless it is resolved by supernatural means. Thus, the step from thesis to ambivalence is painful, and the next step from ambivalence to ecstasy is difficult to achieve. The symbol of the "Centre," [...] the way out of the labyrinth—all these allude to the meeting and "conjunction" of the conscious and the unconscious, as of the union of the lover and the beloved [...] where the binary synthesis is no longer dualistic severance or otherness, difference or separation, nor a balancing of opposing powers, but the assimilation of the lower by the higher, of darkness by light. The symbolism of ascension or ascent alludes not only to the possibility of a superior life for the privileged being, [...] but also to the primary and fundamental tendency of the cosmos to strive towards sublimation—to progress from mud to tears, from lead to gold.¹⁹

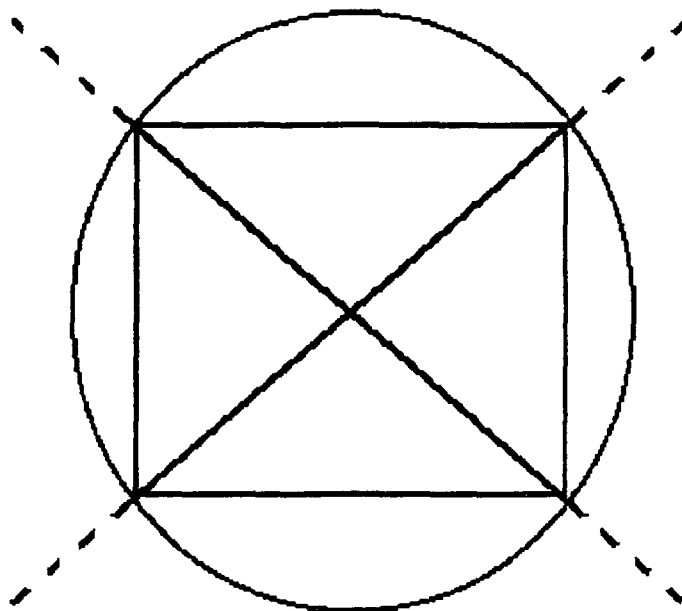
Thus, Arthur's and Little Dorrit's lives correspond to the cycle the individual has to endure in order to overcome physical and psychological restraints. Their marriage at the end of the novel stands not only for a happy ending but for the "unity" of the two societies they respectively represented: the "unity" the individual achieves in relation to his world. The opposition of the negative and the positive gives way to "synthesis," for the individual finally reaches "identification" with his material and spiritual universe. He transcends all possible barriers (frames).

This can be perceived in the expansion of the graphic shown above:

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.26.

GRAPHIC XXXVIII

A World without Boundaries



The endless dotted lines, which stand for the continuation of the “quaternary—spiritual, active or dynamic,” represent the expanding dimension of the individual’s freedom, the lack of boundaries he experiences once he disengages himself from the chains imposed by society. Here, his “active” self overcomes his “passive” one which enables him to go in search of self-fulfilment through the “four rivers which well up from the *fons vitae*”.

Arthur and Little Dorrit, then, represent the individual in a society full of boundaries (frames), but who manages to overcome and break these boundaries. This positive interaction between individual and society represents the various breaks which occurred throughout the novel. The individual who was trapped between physical (*prison*) and psychological boundaries (*ideas*), preached by society, breaks through them and makes his own beliefs and interpretation of the world prevail. The network of tightly closed *frames*

becomes *fragments* allowing the individual to cross his own and society's barriers.

Through the analysis we were able to show how *Dickens breaks all the frames* he built during the narrative and what this act of breaking the frames symbolizes in terms of characters' behaviour and the meaning we find in the final part of the novel. The end of the novel, then, pointed out the sources we needed in order to establish the relationship between the frame structure and the characters' own behaviour in relation to the framework they were obliged to live in. Here, in this thesis, we demonstrated how the author manoeuvred the apparent chaos he wanted us to believe in and how he playfully managed to deceive us in relation to the possible explanation that exists behind the inner workings of the novel.

According to Trilling, one of Dickens's intentions in presenting the bringing-together of all the characters in the novel was to show "an interrelatedness that was universal, that was the very fabric of life [...] Dickens was registering, in fiction, the emergence of the whole idea of society as a great unified fabric".²⁰ In this sense, the thread used to weave the very fabric of *Little Dorrit* is the secret concerning Arthur's birth and Mrs Clennam's link with the Dorrits. Considering the idea of the weaving of a fabric we can further refer to one of Little Dorrit's occupations in the novel, that is, to be a "seamstress," to do her needlework as industriously and quietly as possible so nobody could notice her real duty, which was to weave all the possible threads of the fabric of her life and Arthur's. Therefore, symbolically, she represents the work of the author weaving the fabric of art.

Going back to Frye and Shklovsky's comments on Dickens's work, we can further corroborate the analysis developed here. Frye points out that "the

²⁰ TRILLING, L. "Introduction." In DICKENS, C. *Little Dorrit*. London: Penguin, 1985, p.15-16.

structure that Dickens uses for his novels is the New Comedy structure [...] The main action is a collision of two societies which [may be called] the obstructing and the congenial society”.²¹ Consequently, by following the New Comedy structure we were able to recognize two of the main elements in *Little Dorrit*, the two societies which struggle to maintain and to repel power, respectively. The combination of these two societies, then, gives us the basis for the structural analysis of *Little Dorrit*—the duality we find in the structure employed by the author and what it implies in terms of plot development and all the thematic elements involved in and controlled by it. This combination is corroborated by the fact that *Little Dorrit* is a novel built by means of parallelism. As Shklovsky comments, “in the mystery novel, [parallelism] works through the displacement of one object by another”.²² When a story is expanded into a novel, the dénouement increasingly loses its meaning, for the parallel structure holds dominance over the structure on intersecting plot lines. The possibility of extending the dénouement while sustaining the mystery has led to the fact that *mystery stories* are often chosen as a *framing device*, hence the presence of antagonistic forces within them.

Considering these two views we realize the importance of the technique used by Dickens, for they highlight the important social aspect of his novels. The structure of the novel is the expressive representation of what is behind a social system and of how the individuals move round in it like “travellers,” like individuals whose unknown ways might lead to the end of the labyrinth.

Through our analysis we were able to show how Dickens might have perceived his society and how he tried to convey it in the novel. The matter of

²¹ FRYE, p.220.

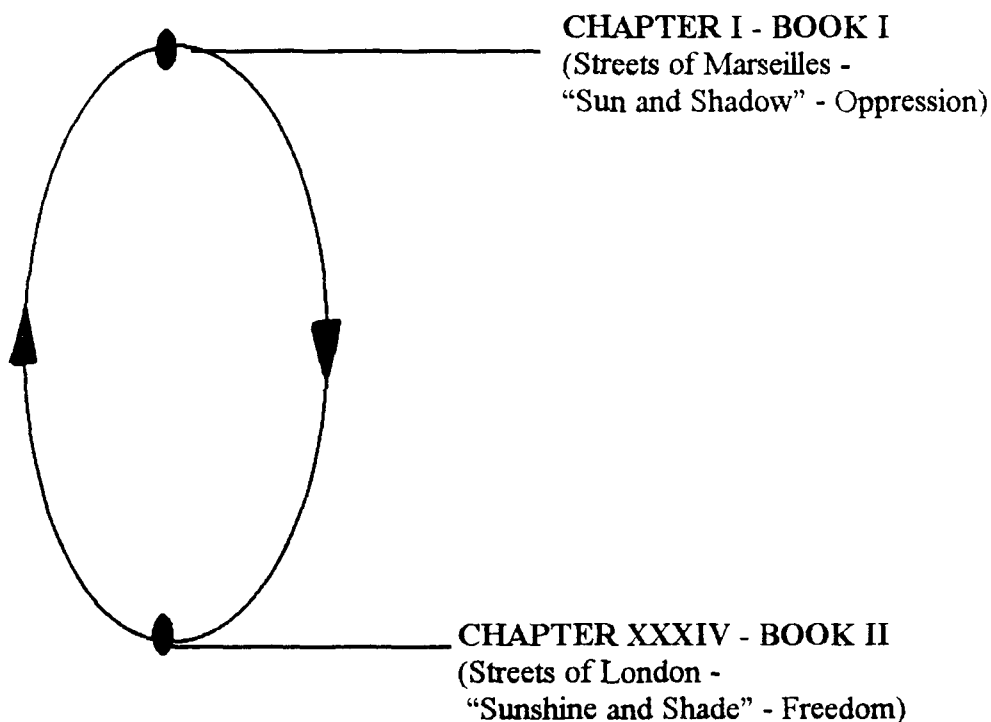
²² SHKLOVSKY, p.120-121, my italics.

structure becomes highly important for it enabled us to establish, through the frame analysis, the various levels of thematic meaning we wanted to highlight. Dickens not only managed to “transfer” to the literary work the idiosyncratic “maze” which characterizes “life” as it is, but the very process in which art attempts to “transform” and “control” such a maze.

This conclusion is clearly perceived if we first consider the negative tone with which the author refers to the universal “stare” at the beginning of the novel, where “Sun and Shadow” (p.1) are symbols of *oppression* over the streets of Marseilles. Second, the positive tone employed to refer to these same symbols which, at the end of the novel, become “Sunshine and Shade” (p.826) where they represent *freedom* over the streets of London, as seen, below, in Graphic XXXIX.

GRAPHIC XXXIX

Freedom versus Oppression



In order to explain the relationship between literal and metaphorical frames better, we dealt with the function of the graphics used in this work and their importance in relation to the analysis of the structural and thematic elements of the novel and how they helped us to reach the conclusions stated above.

This was done through the analysis of the function of *duality versus circularity* which enabled us to explain better the use of the frame theory in order to scrutinize the structure of the novel and how it affected our handling of its various elements. The meaning of the *graphic symbolism* demonstrated how the thematic elements of the novel functioned in relation to each other and how the conclusion that was proposed in this study was reached. The conclusion was also achieved through a *decodification of the frame analysis* employed, which means that through the parts of the final framework we showed the interaction of the pairs of opposition that ran through the novel and found the hidden idea behind the story.

In this last part we were able to tie all the loose ends that were suggested in the course of this work. We also hope to have proved the idea that *Little Dorrit* is both an example of literary mastery and a “document” which exposes the physical and psychological anguish imposed by society on the individual. Dickens shows us that the individual of his time was also a mere “mortal,” a victim of his “weaknesses and passion, searching for an earthly paradise,” while destiny, through its dice-box, unsuccessfully attempted to prevent him from “reaching for the heights”.

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This work presents a structural approach to Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* based on Erving Goffman's theory of frames in *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, which deals with the organization of social interaction. The aims here are, first, to demonstrate that the structural elements of the novel—structure, plot, characterization, point of view, space/time and action—are presented and developed within *literal frames*, which pertain to the *surface level* of the narrative. Second, to analyse these structural elements according to their thematic function within *metaphorical frames*, which are inherent to the *deep level* of the narrative. Third, to prove the existence of “breaks” in all the frames formed by structural and thematic elements and that such breaks mirror the way the characters' action and interaction occur in the story, that is, how social interaction is organized within it. Fourth, to prove how the structure of the novel and its characters reveal the way Victorian society tried to control the individual within material and spiritual boundaries. In order to achieve these objectives, in Chapter I we developed a thorough analysis of the structural elements of the novel in relation to the interrelation and correlation of the *literal frames* they formed in both parts of the novel (Books I/II). Here, apart from having Goffman's theory as a main reference, we also used Boris Uspensky's theory on point of view in *A Poetics of Composition* and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the “chronotope” in his essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel.” The study of these literal frames enabled us to show how structural elements are developed and how they work in order to provide a structural “break” in the novel. In Chapter II, *metaphorical frames* were analysed according to the thematic function of the structural elements mentioned above. This was done through the use of the concept of “duality” as a compositional device, which gave us the means to scrutinize the inner workings of the novel through the symbolic function of thematic elements and of the “breaks” perceived in the literal frames. We were able to scrutinize the dual forces—positive and negative—ruling the story and the individual in it. The conclusions reached in these two chapters were enhanced through the symbolism the graphics employed in this work conveyed. This helped us to explain the relationship between characters/novel and individual/society.

