

FORMULAIC ECCENTRICITY AND CENTRALIZED PERIPHERY IN *BLEAK HOUSE*:
THE PARADOXICAL CREATIVE INSANITY OF DICKENS'S FICTION

by

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(Under the Direction of Richard Menke)

ABSTRACT

Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* is known for its interconnected abundance of characters and its dedication to characterizing "eccentrics." Placed within a wider Dickensian context of *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*, and examined through the lens of narrative, four characters from the "eccentric" category reveal their creative insanity. This "mad artistry" is comparable to eccentricity in other Dickens novels, but is endemic to *Bleak House*, and has a unique bearing on the text despite, and as a result of, their peripheral positions to the narrative and plot. Their most obvious function is to provide individual evidence of Chancery's widespread damage. More importantly, these "mad artists" reveal the psychological motives of the self-effacing narrator Esther, whose autobiography, exaggerations of reality and meta-cognitive creation of creativity and obsession with obsessions are achievements in vicarious expression and re-inscription of self. Most importantly, these peripheral mad artists affect the forces at the center of the novel, and, in part, restore order to the chaos Esther must endure.

INDEX WORDS: Characterization, Narrative, Eccentricity, Madness, Creativity, Consciousness, Language, Center and Periphery

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all eccentrics—both fictional and “real”—but especially to those eccentrics whose creative insanity yields documents.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Subjects of the Study

Charles Dickens's 1853 classic, *Bleak House*, drives its criticism of Victorian society and its "systems" with parody, satire, exaggeration and caricature. Although these aspects of the novel can seem commonplace, Dickens's authorial techniques signal when the "reality" of the "serious" becomes the "surrealis[m]" of exaggeration (Deen 49). The characters, who figure into Dickensian authorship in varying degrees of flatness and roundness, are instrumental in contributing to *Bleak House*'s exaggeration.¹ This thesis asserts the necessity of defining the relationship that the "realistic" and central protagonist Esther Summerson has with the eccentrics she characterizes, and seeks to understand Esther's use for them in *Bleak House*, merely one novel out of Dickens's many that demonstrate his dedication to narrative style and characterization. Alex Woloch's *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* discusses literary evidence of a "formal clash between protagonist[s] and minor characters," causing a potential "disrupt[ion]" in "narrative" (3). Woloch argues that this clash enables minor characters, who are often eccentrics, to "shift the narrative focus away from the established center" (19). Woloch also explains that minor characters, despite their power to claim attention, are often mere "representat[ions] [of] delimited extremes" that are "directed toward a singular being, the protagonist" (18). Applied to Esther and her eccentrics, Woloch's theory suggests that the first-person narrator Esther creates characters, in part, to represent herself.

Out of the more than seventy characters in *Bleak House*, there are four eccentrics who share common traits and tendencies within the *Bleak House* sections that Esther narrates: Miss Flite, Mr. Krook, Harold Skimpole and old Mr. Turveydrop. Evidence of Dickens's "originals" for characters and prior critical attention to eccentrics' tendencies invites further intimate examinations of these characters on the microscopic level, at which characters reveal their existence as literary and performative (Alexander 3).² All together, these characters' behavioral abnormalities suggest insanity as well as creativity. Esther's descriptions of these characters register upon readers' senses (or imagined senses) of the visual and the aural, and recur in several areas of *Bleak House*, thus presenting a paradox; Dickensian eccentricity is formulaic, a conflation of "unpredictab[ility]" and "repetit[ion]" (Woloch 83). By establishing a subcategory of Dickensian characterization and by closely analyzing each character, this thesis will provide future readers of *Bleak House* with insight into the eccentricity of fictional characters—what they reveal about narrators and how they fit into larger textual frameworks.

Scope of Study

David Copperfield (1850) and *Hard Times* (1854), novels immediately preceding and following *Bleak House*, reveal that Dickens's *Bleak House* formulae for characterizing eccentrics exist elsewhere. In addition to these three novels' consecutive publications, considerations of style and theme provide reasons for placing *Bleak House* in the context of *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*. Preceding *Bleak House*, *David Copperfield* is a novel whose narrative of the coming-of-age experience is driven primarily by characterization. In *Hard Times*, the novel that follows *Bleak House*, social criticism takes precedence over characterization. Positioned in the middle, *Bleak House* creates a hybrid of these two agendas, and thus presents "instability in its own form," as it fuels its cry for the reform of "social instability" through characters whose

complexity and peculiarity are products of the novels' unstable form and the unstable society depicted within the novel (Newsome 150). The eccentrics themselves, who are functions of these novelistic agendas of personal development and social commentary and who fit into this stylistic and thematic progression from *David Copperfield* to *Bleak House* to *Hard Times*, show that *Bleak House* is the pivot point around which eccentricity is sharpened and expanded, and that it operates by its own conventions. In keeping with this chronological arrangement and by focusing on *Bleak House*, I have decided to use *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times* as references and comparisons against which *Bleak House* eccentricity can be more accurately defined, enabling me to identify authorial progress.

¹ Alex Woloch's *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* cites E. M. Forster's "conceptualiz[ation]" of "flatness," which "renders subordinate characters allegorical [. . .] in [. . .] compelling distortions" (20). Suzanne Keen's *Narrative Form*, also citing Forster, establishes "round" characters as having a fully -functioning interiority and "psychological depth" (32-33). Additionally, Leonard Deen discusses Dickens's repetition of characters, particularly the minor eccentrics, in *Bleak House* as a way to "unif[y]" the novel's "disorganiz[ation]" (45). The "persons whose main function is parody," become "stylized," he argues, so that "they are distorted and reduced to the elements that are necessary to the expression of a single theme." He continues by explaining that "most characters are reduced to characteristics," and thus they are "dehumanize[d]" (49-56).

² Doris Alexander examines Dickens's use of his peers and associates as models for characterizing "Bad Old Men" in *Bleak House* – Krook and Skimpole, to name two. Dickens "tak[es] from his originals [. . .] their personality, appearance and idiosyncratic speech," Alexander explains (3). On a similar mission, Ingham focuses her discussion on Dickens's women, and shows how the author "relate[s] each woman to an archetypal figure in his life" (2). Esther and Lady Dedlock are the main subjects of Ingham's study.

CHAPTER 2

APPROACHING ECCENTRICITY THROUGH NARRATIVE

Narrators' Extensions of Self

Any commentary on the eccentricity of these novels and the authorial progress the eccentrics show necessitates an examination of narration, the barrier between readers and the characters who “compel attention in-and-of-themselves,” but who have a “genitive relationship to the protagonist[s]” and narrators (Woloch 2). Just as *Bleak House* is a hybrid of the thematic agendas presented in its preceding and succeeding novels, it also presents a hybrid of narrative form. Evidencing Dickens’s continued interest in the first-person narrative he uses in *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*’s Esther Summerson is both a character in and narrator of the novel. And foreshadowing Dickens’s resumption of the third-person narrator for *Hard Times*, *Bleak House*’s anonymous third-person narrator provides omniscience and objectivity, however questionable. Dona Budd’s “Language Couples in *Bleak House*” engages in a discussion of the “sexual politics of the novel” by pairing characters (often husbands and wives) according to their relationships to language (196). All of these couples, she argues, “reflect the narrating pair,” who represent “gendered authority” (196). While the anonymous narrator represents “patriarchal power” over the “public” and “global” through “iron[y],” Esther has a “glimpse” into “private” and “sentimental” domesticity (214, 197, 216). This combination of questionable omniscience and subjective personal involvement with events and denied “access [. . .] to [. . .] character[s]’ thoughts” in *Bleak House* determines how eccentrics are portrayed (Woloch 13-4).¹

Even though Dickens provides readers with this double vision into the events and characters of *Bleak House*, Esther's narrative is the main source of portrayal of characters who are creatively insane, and thus, must be the focus of my consideration of the novel's narrative. As a first-person narrator, Esther has much in common with David. Figuring as the only narrative voice and vision into the events and characters of *David Copperfield*, David helps to show that Esther's autobiography, while sharing narrative duty in *Bleak House*, is an attempt to convince readers that she will focus primarily on others, and is an exhibition of undeniable egocentrism. David's earliest chapters, as his second chapter's title "I Observe" indicates, detail his perceptions of surroundings, and suggest that observation (which is part of any first-person narrative) will drive the whole of his story (*DC* 24). While David's audience is meant to assume that he labors under no pretense, and that his perception and representation of reality are as "[close] and accura[te]" as possible, David is straightforward about his intent to "record" the story of his "own life," in which some inaccuracy is unavoidable (*DC* 24, 13). By engaging in observation, David sets up a self-other construct, defining his exterior self by virtue of opposition to others who are his supporting cast and crew, foils and markers by which he can measure his function and worth. In so doing, David, who wants to be "sure of his identity" (Tambling xxxviii), makes himself the "hero" of his story (*DC* 13), the "'living person' whose distinct personality is externalized through the literary work as a whole" (Woloch 2). This definition of himself as "hero" and his acknowledgement that he is working from childhood memories (whether "strong" or not) signal David's pointed and "externalized" characterization of his surroundings and emphasize his subjectivity (Woloch 2). All of David's supporting characters affect his personal development and fall into either of two categories: those who hinder his success and those who aid it. Whether others' eccentricity contributes to David's advancement or

causes setbacks, David characterizes those around him in order to identify whom he is grateful for and whom he holds responsible for his own unhappiness.

Even though Esther has much in common with David, she represents Dickens's attempt at "appropriat[ing] [. . .] the female voice" and consciousness, and thus, Esther exhibits concerns that are different than those of David (Budd 218). As with David, Dickens establishes early on Esther's lack of a secure home and place, a circumstance that prevents an easy defining of her existence. But whereas David's parentage is clear, Esther's parentage is a mystery, and thus her identity is even more dubious than that of her predecessor. As a result of Esther's crises of self-perception and her godmother's insistence that "submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it," Esther is convinced of her worthlessness and lack of "clever[ness]," and wastes no time conveying to her readers an agenda of self-diminishment in her "biography" of others' stories: "It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself, [. . .] as if this narrative were the narrative of *my* life!" (*BH* 19, 17, 27). Budd argues that Esther's control over her own sections (whether she chooses to focus on others or on herself) and the advantage of intimate "glimpse[s]" into circumstances, mean that she "is recruited and absorbed into a patriarchal agenda" (216-217). Certainly, the "oblig[ation]" of which Esther speaks attests to her limited agency. Effacing herself further, Esther insists on immediately de-centralizing the position that she holds in relation to others' peripheral positions, reassuring herself and readers of her modesty and selflessness: "But my little body will soon fall into the background now" (*BH* 27). As a "background" presence in a story that she narrates, Esther can engage in "Davidian" observation, but unlike David, she refuses to admit to an egocentric and autobiographical agenda.

In discussing the literary and sexual complexities of female narration and heroism, Roxanne Eberle's *Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing: Interrupting the Harlot's Progress* summarizes Nancy Armstrong's argument that "the domestic woman's authority derives from disciplined self-regulation" (3). I would argue that Armstrong's thesis offers an appropriate argument for an examination of Esther's (unsuccessful) resignation of herself to minor status. Eberle additionally points out Cora Kaplan's disparagement of Mary Wollstonecraft's "offer[ing]" of "libidinized self-denial," and identifies contrasting instances when "sexually transgressive" authors' "narrative technique and sexual irregularities are conflated" (23, 232). Notions of Esther's sexuality and sexual consciousness do not figure into this study of Esther's characterization of eccentricity, but Eberle's discussion of narrative informs the notion of Esther's gender consciousness, which does figure into the study. Esther's feminine self-denial of happiness at the initial expense of centrality—"rub[bing]" her writing "out [. . .], because it gives [her] so much pleasure"—is also a means to derive pleasure, despite her godmother's words (*BH* 378). Nonetheless, Esther's attempts to convince her readership of her selflessness and humility are futile, as her "struggle for self-realization and her yearning to love and be loved" take over (Page 90). What results is Esther's assertion that she "must write" (*BH* 378), and "[her] portion of these pages" becomes largely *autobiography* (*BH* 17). Her narrative also shows how others lavish affection on her, pay her much attention, how she becomes the central focus of "everybody" as a result of a "conspiracy to make [her] happy" (*BH* 437). Her acknowledgement of and commentary on these actions of others serve to re-centralize herself not only to others, but also and most importantly, to herself. Through this de-centralizing and re-centralizing of her position and creation of a supporting cast and crew, Esther sets herself in a "Davidian" position for being the heroine and "living person" of her own story,

“externaliz[ing]” herself throughout her narrative (Woloch 2). Intensifying what David does in his narrative, Esther externalizes, distorts and exaggerates her surroundings and supporting cast, and in some cases vilifies them, so that she is comparatively moderate and virtuous. What results is that her ostensible deprecation is “back-handedly self-laudatory,” a detectable achievement in self-admiration (Budd 214).

Just as Esther’s false modesty turns into opportunities to promote her value, her self-effacement and insistence on diminishment become the means to re-inscribe herself “innumerabl[y]” and even aggrandize herself in the pages of her narrative (Newsome 83). Both her “retreat from her own intelligence and expressive power” and her desire to diminish her presence in the tale, whether sincere or not, require Esther to find ways to confirm and preserve her existence, lest her diminishment be successful and she disappear altogether (Budd 215). Replicating her name and voice—“Esther, Esther, Esther!”—when reminding herself of “Duty [. . .]!” (*BH* 76), and projecting her will, consciousness and purpose onto objects, are vocal and material ways for Esther to re-inscribe herself in and maintain her relevance to the story, even when the narrative focus gravitates elsewhere. Early in her story, Esther projects herself onto “dear faithful Dolly,” and later reassigns her existence to “housekeeping keys” and her image in “looking-glass[es],” as she becomes increasingly important to others (*BH* 17, 65, 433). Continually upgrading her self-preservation, Esther eventually projects her “good” self onto humans. Characters such as Lady Dedlock and Charley, through familial resemblance and servile presence as Esther’s “reincarnat[ed] [. . .] doll,” respectively provide Esther with identity and a validation for a semi-aristocratic existence (Newsome 79). Toward the end of her narrative, Esther imagines the near replication of her very person in detailing the birth of Caddy’s “small and weak” child, “little Esther” (*BH* 599). Even though “little Esther[’s]” health is poor, it is

possible that Esther relives, through this child, her original feeling that she herself should have “never breathed” and her eventual realization that “[she] could not have been intended to die (*BH* 453-4). Esther’s self-replication is possible also through her quotation of Jarndyce’s insistence that “there must be two little women, for his little woman was never missing” and through her “[resolve] to be doubly dutiful and gay” (*BH* 605). Even though Esther's efforts to ensure Jarndyce's pleasure require that she affect her own pleasure, as she goes “about the house [. . .] humming [. . .] and working in a desperation,” Esther feels secure knowing that she is “doubly” needed (*BH* 605).

In addition to preserving her existence and establishing identity, Esther’s diminishment and re-inscription of self allow vicarious indulgence in desires and expression of her true personality. For this indulgence to be successful, Esther must project her “bad” self onto minor characters, who exhibit the extreme versions of the selfishness and self-indulgence she is too afraid to show and need safe keeping. Rendered parasitically useless, the mad artists Turveydrop and Skimpole are extensions of her desire for others to exert themselves to “make [her] happy” (*BH* 437). But Miss Miss Flite and Krook, arguably the craziest of the mad artists, are extensions of Esther’s desire for a useful creativity that resists and dismantles hindrances, even the hindrances that are self-imposed. To the casual observer, Esther does successfully diminish herself, as her characterization of the eccentrics makes her exterior self seem comparatively moderate and non-descript. Esther betrays herself, however, by describing her obligation to engage in autobiography as “curious,” her synonym for “eccentric.” This “curious[ness]” of writing is a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the eccentric minor characters, whom Esther takes such pains to exaggerate, show that her own narrative is an eccentric way to remedy the feeling that she goes unnoticed (*BH* 27).

Like David, Esther achieves her self-definition of exteriority and interiority, through a narrative that is possibly an unreliable representation of truth. Robert Donovan observes that Esther's "power of subjecting every experience to the play of different lights and colors" is a power that "undermine[s]" and "destroy[s] her value as a narrator" (41). However, Esther's narrative is a reliable representation of her own personal preoccupations. That the eccentrics represent the damage of which Chancery is capable is no coincidence, as they are Esther's media for expressing her frustration with the Court's system, specifically the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit, that "has stretched forth its unwholesome hand to spoil and corrupt" (*BH* 8). Robert Newsome rightly argues that "Esther stands as Dickens's novelistic antidote for morbidity" (115). Certainly, her alias surname "Summerson" attests to her cheerful influence on other characters and spaces that she inhabits: "They said there could be no East wind where Somebody was; they said that wherever Dame Durden went, there was sunshine and summer air" (*BH* 378). But by characterizing her surroundings, Esther "stands" as an "antidote" for herself (Newsome 115), as she vents her frustration with Chancery and expresses her "uneasiness" about her own safety and sanity through the madness of the eccentrics (*BH* 52). Whereas several of the sexualized heroines that Eberle discusses look for an "emancipatory narrative which will free them from the madhouse" (41), Esther uses narrative as a way to *create* a madhouse as an externalized repository for her madness within. By consciously projecting her own pathologies onto biographized fictional characters, Esther can be comparatively sane and safely protected from the ills that plague the eccentrics, just as she is comparatively non-descript.

This study will show that Esther's pains to create such minor characters at length, despite the potential threat to "narrative progression" caused by "space and attention" to minor characters, speak of yet another narrative use for the eccentrics, in addition to their function as

embodiments of her excessive (though warranted) desires for existence, relevance, identity and place (Woloch 13). Esther's diminution, reapportionment and aggrandizement reveal her narration and characterization to be contradictory manifestations of what she desires and loathes, as well as enacts and prevents. As I've pointed out, Esther insists in the first chapter of her story that she "know[s] she is not clever," and that any recognition of her own ability to think is merely "vanity" (*BH* 17-9). This insistence bolsters her peripheral imperative and "libidinized" self-denial of pleasure (Eberle 23). But just as her characterization of eccentrics is a repository for her own madness and excess, the specific sub-category of the mad artist eccentrics—Miss Flite, Krook, Turveydrop and Skimpole—become repositories for the intellectual and creative talent Esther often professes not to have. J. Hillis Miller observes that Esther fosters "pretence not to understand the dishonesty, hypocrisy or self-deception of the people she encounters" (16). Combined with Esther's true abilities to interpret her surroundings and other characters, distort and exaggerate them in memory and reinvent them in narration, this "pretence" shows that her deprecation, spanning so many areas of her existence, becomes again an achievement in self-admiration and promotion.

Just as Esther's crisis of narrative identity demonstrates Dickens's revision of first-person narration, *Bleak House*'s eccentrics, understood to be Esther's re-inscriptions of self and evidence of her creativity, demonstrate Dickens's revision of characters' eccentricity from that in *David Copperfield*. The positions of *Bleak House*'s eccentrics in the respective character-systems and plots also show the revision of eccentricity. Unlike *David Copperfield*'s eccentrics whose direct relation to the main plot and close proximity to David himself allow them some plausibility, *Bleak House*'s eccentrics are pushed even further to the periphery of the novel's plot and cast of characters, and their bearing on events' outcome is less discernible.² This way,

readers' "willing suspension of disbelief" and acceptance of the eccentrics' existence in this novel are more difficult (Coleridge 478). Certainly, Dickens, whose preface to *Bleak House* articulates his response to expectations of realism, had this effect of implausibility in mind. "In *Bleak House*," he advises, "I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things" (BH 4).³ This increase in readers' disbelief that results from further marginalizing the eccentrics necessitates finding a "realistic" place for the eccentrics to exist. Thus, their traits and tendencies are gathered and assigned new textual tasks and functions within *Bleak House*, namely as the repositories and projections of Esther that I've pointed out. Eccentricity becomes more general and all-encompassing as it advances from *Bleak House* to *Hard Times*, as Dickens returns to a third-person vision into circumstances, and as he keeps the eccentric characters out of the periphery in order to centralize them in the *Hard Times* character-system with more "realistic" conspicuousness. The unconventionality of individual characters in *Hard Times* results partly from the narrative voice, conventional in its singularity, but continuing the linguistic playfulness in which both *Bleak House* narrators engage. As the central orchestrator of plot, the narrator subsumes the voice of eccentricity and enjoys his status as intellectually interested and omnisciently distant protagonist. Thus, idiosyncrasy becomes the focus of plot and principle of a novel, rather than merely the category of a character.

I've shown that as narrators, David and Esther define their bland exteriority by virtue of their opposition to the exterior excesses of the eccentrics. I've also shown that whereas David professes no designs to extract himself from his narrative, and therefore needs no re-inscription into his own tale, Esther hints at her sameness to those characters she "eccentricizes" as a way to re-inscribe herself. Like Esther and David, the *Hard Times* narrator is meta-cognitive and vicarious in telling a story and developing characters, and expresses approval of those

individuals he favors and criticism of those he disdains. Unlike Esther and David, the *Hard Times* narrator, providing the eccentric voice over the characters and events, takes no self-disciplinary action against excess, has no designs of casting himself as the bland “hero,” and therefore favors characters who are similarly and creatively eccentric—Sissy Jupe and Louisa Gradgrind—and bestows upon them his narrative grace and compassion. Disdainful of the non-creatives, the narrator unleashes his condemnation. Thomas Gradgrind and Josiah Bounderby are the *Hard Times* archetypes for discipline and reason because of their distaste for “Fancy,” and desire to squelch unconventionality in other characters while suppressing what Fancy they may have themselves. Since these two characters challenge the *Hard Times* narrator’s partiality to “Fancy,” the narrator naturally exaggerates the tendencies and traits he deems their faults, creating in them, in fact, a new eccentricity. Thus, within the narration, the stringency of Gradgrind and Bounderby is undercut by the eccentricity they unknowingly possess and exhibit. As a result of narrative grace and condemnation, eccentricity and the characterization of it in *Hard Times* exist in reverse of what readers would expect from a novel following *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*. Taking on the persona of eccentricity, the *Hard Times* narrator graces fanciful characters by portraying them as normal, and condemns the non-fanciful characters by portraying them as abnormal.

Defining madness and creativity in *Hard Times* proves difficult, given the presence and nature of the eccentrics in *David Copperfield*, and is especially difficult given the eccentrics in *Bleak House*, in which eccentricity is revised and relegated to the periphery, and from which eccentricity foreshadows the novel as an idiosyncratic whole. Whereas madness in *Bleak House* and even in *David Copperfield* results from unbridled creativity, madness in *Hard Times* results from squelched creativity. “Mad artistry,” of course, would be an egregious misnomer for

characterization in *Hard Times*. Nonetheless, the conspicuous combinations of madness and creativity in the eccentric characters and narrator in *Hard Times* necessitate terms such as “creative sanity” and “mad mundanity,” terms which define the dual nature of *Hard Times*’s eccentricity.

Bleak House as Mad Artistry Hinge

As I begin the close reading of eccentricity, I must reiterate that my analysis of *Bleak House* eccentricity is limited to the mad artist category. These limits, along with the search for mad artists within the larger context of Dickensian authorship, demonstrate that mad artistry is a characterization technique endemic to *Bleak House*, in so far as these three texts are concerned. The few exceptions to this rule, as my analysis will show, are *David Copperfield*’s Micawber and Mr. Dick and *Hard Times*’s Mr. Sleary. Positioned between *David Copperfield*’s eccentricity as David’s creative representation of surroundings and *Hard Times*’s (normalized) eccentricity as creative escape from confines and ills of a system, *Bleak House*’s eccentricity remains the hinge, presenting mad artists who are creative in order to represent and escape from their sense of reality. As such, *Bleak House* remains the intellectual focus between *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*.

¹ Additionally, Woloch points out that “nineteenth-century social realism, [. . .] infuse[s] [the novel] with an awareness of its potential to shift the narrative focus away from an established center, toward minor characters” (19).

² Woloch discusses the character-system in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, which “push[es] more and more characters to the margin” as the protagonist Elizabeth becomes more prominent (113). This aspect of Austen’s novel is relevant to an examination of Esther’s positioning of herself within her narrative, as well as Dickens’s varying positionings of eccentrics.

³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in the fourteenth chapter of his *Biographia Literaria*, discusses the combination of “semblance of truth” and “shadows of imagination” necessary for optimum poetic effect. To deal with this deviation from reality, readers must “suspen[d] disbelief” in the unreal and have “poetic faith” (Coleridge 478). Knowledge of Coleridge’s contribution to the study of literature is helpful for analysis of novel and characters created by Charles Dickens, who continually plays with the “tension between the fictional (Romantic) and the real (familiar) worlds” (Newsome 8).

CHAPTER 3

LANGUAGE PATTERNS

Speech and Syntax

Critical commentary on characterization focuses on the narrative language that shapes the characters themselves. Characters “exist only in language,” according to J. Hills Miller, whom Robert Newsome quotes in *Dickens on the Romantic Side of Familiar Things* (Newsome 13). More specifically, Woloch provides A. J. Greimas’ “hermeneutic/semantic” contribution to Russian Formalism’s theories on characterization: “Greimas [. . .] tries to show that our very cognition of characters is mediated through syntactical structures” (Woloch 16). These arguments concerning readers’ perception of characters’ existence are convenient and appropriate, given the eccentric minor characters’ “genitive relationship to the protagonist” (Woloch 2). “In narrative,” Ann Banfield argues, “linguistic functions [. . .] give grammatical shape” to “speech” and “subjectivity”; thus, there is no better way to characterize unconventionality than through a narrator’s innovation of linguistic conventions to suit his or her perception of surroundings (528). This innovation results in “sharply distinguished voices” (Page 79) and “idiosyncratic statements and repetitions, making the characters who utter them single-minded to the point of being maniacal” (Tambling xiv). Well before *Bleak House*, characterization of eccentrics through language had become one of Dickens’s trademark authorial tools, as eccentrics in the preceding novel *David Copperfield* show. Dickens’s trademark is also apparent “the transform[ation] [of] homogeneity into character” in *Sketches by*

Boz and the “colorful individualism” in *The Pickwick Papers*, both of which “prefigur[e]” eccentricity in the novels (Saville 783).

In *David Copperfield*, the character who translates easily into *Bleak House*’s syntactical eccentricity is Betsey Trotwood (Newsome 13). *David Copperfield*’s characterization of Betsey Trotwood follows Tambling’s useful summation of eccentricity’s unconventional use of language through her repetitions and demonstrations of single-mindedness. “I intend to be her friend,” Betsey says of the yet unborn David, whom she insists will be a girl:

I intend to be her godmother, and I beg you’ll call her Betsey Trotwood Copperfield. There must be no mistakes in life with *this* Betsey Trotwood. There must be no trifling with her affections, poor dear. She must be well brought up, and well guarded from reposing any foolish confidences where they are not deserved. I must make that *my* care. (DC 19)

Further establishing Betsey’s unconventional relationship to language, this passage, with its repetitive insistence on the unborn baby’s sex, single-minded preoccupation with a sense of domestic injustice and plans for reparative feminist agenda, punctuates its sentences with motion: “There was a twitch of Miss Betsey’s head, after each of these sentences, as if her old wrongs were working within her” (DC 19). With respect to David himself, it is obvious here that Aunt Betsey’s eccentricity contributes largely to David’s initial male anxiety and eventual establishment of upstanding manhood.

Continuing and revising Aunt Betsey, *Bleak House*’s first (and most endearing) “mad artist,” Miss Flite, appears in both the anonymous narrator’s sections and in Esther’s. Using less detail and adopting a disinterested voice when characterizing Miss Flite, the anonymous narrator does not provide descriptions of speech, and opts for generalized and perfunctory stage

directions: “Standing on a seat at the side of the hall, the better to peer into the curtained sanctuary, is a little mad old woman in a squeezed bonnet, who is always in court, from its sitting to its rising, and always expecting some incomprehensible judgment to be given in her favor” (*BH* 7). Although these details alone are insufficient indicators of Miss Flite’s madness, the anonymous narrator has injected the adjective “mad,” a descriptor occurring many times in Esther’s narrative. Contrasting the anonymous narrator’s version of Miss Flite, and proving Miller’s observation about characters and language, Esther’s earliest encounter with this eccentric establishes an immediate sense of the old woman’s “curious” eccentricity through descriptions of the “old woman[’s]” speech, a clear demonstration of an unconventional relationship with language: “The wards in Jarndyce! Ve-ry happy, I am sure, to have the honour! [. . .] “It is a good omen for youth, and hope, and beauty, when they find themselves in this place, and don’t know what’s to come of it” (*BH* 34). Here, Esther points out Miss Flite’s preoccupation with Chancery as does the anonymous narrator, but takes the time—unlike the anonymous narrator—to provide direct quotation. Further showing her unconventional relationship to language, Miss Flite agrees with Richard’s assessment of her insanity, and replies, while “curtseying low, and smiling between every little sentence”:

Right! Mad, young gentleman. [. . .] I was a ward myself. I was not mad at that time. [. . .] I had youth and hope. I believe, beauty. It matters very little now. Neither of the three served, or saved me. I have the honour to attend Court regularly. With my documents. I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. I have discovered that the sixth seal mentioned in the Revelation is the Great Seal. It has been open a long time! Pray accept my blessing. (*Dickens* 34)

In this passage, whole sentences are divided into their dependent and independent clauses, and into modifiers, nouns, adverbs and verbs, so that fragments, even single words, function for Miss Flite as though they were syntactically correct and complete. Esther herself, a young “[wo]man of letters” (Saville 786), calls these little outbursts of speech “sentences,” and punctuates them with periods to facilitate readers’ detection of syntactical division. Also, Esther emphasizes punctuation with the image of Miss Flite’s movement, as the old lady “curtsey[s] and smile[s] between every little sentence,” as though each “sentence” were a gesture (*BH* 34). With these syntactical divisions and courtesy, Miss Flite, a product of a woman’s characterization, shows a future of female eccentricity that is more congenial than the head “twitch[es]” characteristic of Betsey Trotwood’s feminist agenda (*DC* 19). But the object of Miss Flite’s single-mindedness, Chancery, shows that eccentricity in *Bleak House* is a result of social disorder rather than domestic disorder.

Hard Times, of course, repeats and advances the characteristics of Betsey Trotwood and Miss Flite, giving them a new purpose. Similarly to David and Esther, Thomas Gradgrind wants his exteriority to oppose eccentricity with his insistence on “Fact.” But whereas Esther’s criticism of, wonderment at and engagement in eccentricity is manifested mainly in her narrative interiority so that she can be comparatively moderate on the exterior, Gradgrind—as a character within *Hard Times*’s narrator’s consciousness—vocalizes his distaste for and annoyance with unconventionality with school lessons and admonishments, and presents himself as the Coketown archetype for discipline and reason. *Hard Times*’s first paragraph of the first page that comprises the whole of the first chapter immediately establishes Thomas Gradgrind’s insistence on Fact (which is this novel’s noun of choice for conventionality) and protests against Fancy (the noun of choice for eccentricity):

Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir! (9)

Here, Gradgrind is so excessive that the conventionality he insists upon and believes himself to have is questionable. Just as Esther hints at her own eccentricity through her characterization of her surroundings, Gradgrind reveals his own eccentricity through his denouncement of others' eccentricity, and marks a smooth transition from *Bleak House* to *Hard Times*.¹ Consistent with this novel's graduation of eccentricity, the narrator wastes no time establishing that eccentricity is unavoidable no matter how fervent efforts are to suppress it, that it's unavoidable *especially* when it's suppressed. As in Miss Flite's speeches, the sentences in Gradgrind's speech are short and choppy, and punctuation is aided by a gesture, demonstrating this novel's consistency with Esther's narrative attention to syntactical division and completion in *Bleak House*: "The speaker's square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve" (*HT* 9). But demonstrating *Hard Times*'s narrative evolution of syntactical division and completion, this passage is considerably more grammatical than is Miss Flite's, as sentences contain at least both subjects and main verbs before the punctuation. Nonetheless, Gradgrind reveals his typically eccentric one-track mind, a result of the social, educational and domestic disorder that is presented in *Hard Times*.

Hinging between *David Copperfield*'s and *Hard Times*'s single-minded and syntactically divisive speakers, Miss Flite's sense of syntactical division and completion is the most unconventional of the three, thus drawing attention to the questionable coherence and clarity of

her meaning.² Miss Flite's exaggerated physical animation, sputtering speech and scatter of documents contradict her singular purpose of witnessing the "judgment" of Chancery. Yet despite the unnecessary syntactical choppiness of her sentences, her meaning becomes clear and coherent at the end of each succession of "little sentence[s]" as though the sentences were pieced together. In addition to breaking apart single unified sentences without losing coherence and meaning, Miss Flite frequently breaks apart single words, and actually adds coherence. Even though the virtual separation of a small word comprised of one or two syllables into two words further attests to Miss Flite's desire to over-produce and replicate, "very" and "yes" as "ve-ry" and "ye-es" better emphasize, verify and qualify her points (*BH* 34). Another exposure to Miss Flite's manner of speech links her linguistically reproductive compulsion to her cognitively reproductive compulsion, as she imagines her thought and purpose to be more than they are. Explaining to the "wards" the order of her daily events, Miss Flite again splits apart whole sentences into several: "I usually walk here early. Before the Court sits. It's retired. I collect my thoughts here for the business of the day" (*BH* 47). The operative word in this sentence is "collect." Miss Flite's belief that organization is necessary emphasizes the fact that her thoughts are few in number and demonstrates Miss Flite's illusion of quantity. Miss Flite also shows her aggrandizement of her mental processes with her enthusiastic assertion of their magnitude: "The business of the day requires a great deal of thought," she says. While the subject matter of her thought may be of great importance, since Chancery affects so many lives, and while she asserts that she "think[s] much" (*BH* 53), there is not a "great deal" of thought (*BH* 47).

Esther's introduction to Krook at his Rag and Bottle Warehouse provides another view of *Bleak House* eccentrics' replication of language. The first words Krook says upon Esther's entrance are, "Hi hi," demonstrating Esther's perception of his peculiar need to express

salutations twice in one utterance (*BH* 49). Krook follows up his double greeting with a double invitation into his shop: “Aye, Aye! [. . .] Come in, come in!” (*BH* 50). In contrast, the anonymous narrator’s portrayal of Krook’s speech quotes merely a single “Hi!” (*BH* 125). Both Miss Flite’s and Krook’s manipulations of language establish that replicated and divided speech—separating the expression of one thought into several—serves as these eccentrics’ device for convincing themselves that they have much to say. Since these characters’ language is largely the product of Esther’s characterization, their enumeration of speech indicates Esther’s own eccentricity, and serves as one of her devices for vicarious self-replication and re-inscription.

Speech and Rhetoric

Whereas Miss Flite and Krook are identified by their replicated speech, old Mr. Turveydrop and Harold Skimpole are identified by their eloquent and persuasive rhetoric. As with Krook and Miss Flite, both Skimpole and Turveydrop are depicted according to Esther’s narrative agendas of expressing social and domestic frustration and re-inscribing herself. *David Copperfield*’s Uriah Heep and Wilkins Micawber, however, prefigure and inform the characterization of Turveydrop and Skimpole in *Bleak House*. Uriah Heep repeats words and phrases that are immediately identifiable as part of his character. His single-minded, or rather, concentrated, malice toward and deception of others, are “inflect[ions]” of David’s “hostile consciousness” at work to make himself comparatively good (Woloch 146). Marked by his disarming and dangerous pretense of humility, Heep insists repeatedly throughout the novel that he is “a very umble person” (*DC* 244). His omission of the first consonant in “humble” quickly becomes his trademark signal of excessive protestation against arrogance and pride, indicating, of course, his arrogance and pride, as well as his influence on others: “I am very umble to the

present moment, Master Copperfield, but I've got a little power!" (*DC* 581). In addition, Uriah's false humility and constant flattery function to weaken David's powers of resistance to and prevention of Uriah's machinations, as Uriah is careful not to reveal his underlying evil with any straightforward language. Asking David for the "goodness to keep [his] secret" of his love for Agnes Wickfield from disclosure, Uriah is sure to "umbly" remark, "I know what a friendly heart you've got," and presumes that David "wouldn't wish to make unpleasantness" (*DC* 389). David's "best course" is inaction—"to do nothing, and to keep to [him]self what [he] had heard" (*DC* 391).

The paternal and "good natured" (*DC* 179) Wilkins Micawber "transform[s] sordid financial deficiency into the stuff of high melodrama and histrionics" (Saville 791). As a result, Micawber's rhetoric nearly matches Uriah Heep's false humility in terms of intolerability. In his letters requesting money, Micawber's rhetorical technique is to sever a first-person connection to his debt by referring to himself in the third-person—"the undersigned"—in efforts to deny any personal responsibility in his own mind and in that of David. In addition, he insists he's a "helpless victim," and signs his letters with a melodramatic description and visual indication of his descent into despondency: "it would be a work of supererogation to add, that dust and ashes are for ever scattered

"On

"The

"Head

"Of

"Wilkins Micawber." (436). Micawber's compositional avoidance of responsibility is the subject of David's pointed commentary, and serves as a contrast to David's

ability to escape exploitation at the warehouse of Murdstone and Grinby and later direct his efforts toward successful composition.

In *Bleak House*, which shows the expansion of Dickens's interest in those such as Micawber "who cannot be easily placed in relation to the existing social order" (Page 51), the characters Turveydrop and Skimpole secure a lifestyle of ease using their skills of rhetorical persuasion. Whereas Uriah drives his rhetoric by his insistence on humility, and whereas Micawber drives his rhetoric by casting himself as a helpless victim of circumstance, Skimpole drives his logic with claims of altruism, such that his pretentious childishness and insistence on his "incapacity for details and world affairs" are almost persuasive: "I almost feel as if *you* ought to be grateful to *me*, for giving you the opportunity of enjoying the luxury of generosity. I know you like it. For [. . .] I may have come into the world expressly for the purpose of increasing your stock of happiness" (*BH* 67). These claims of benevolent allowance of others' generosity are strangely reminiscent of Esther's delight in others taking pleasure in "conspir[ing] to make [her] happy" (*BH* 437) and her later "allow[ance]" of Mrs. Woodcourt "to take as little as gratified her kindness without tasking it" (*BH* 748). With his claims of benevolence, Skimpole's rhetorical persuasiveness enables him to take advantage of his incompetence, and claim, as Norman Page argues, a "socio-economic status that renders it unnecessary for him to pursue any profession seriously," and still "enjoy [. . .] upper-class luxuries" (51).

Likewise, Turveydrop's rhetoric is driven by claims of altruism, which Esther's narrative irony calls his "benignity" and "uncommon generosity" (*BH* 293-4). With her irony, Esther means, of course, just the opposite. When old Mr. Turveydrop confronts the prospect of losing the labor of his son on which he subsists, when Prince and Caddy become engaged, Turveydrop's "sacrific[icial]" bestowal of a blessing and insurance of his future ease are one-

and-the-same. By “car[ing]” for the “happiness” of his “son and daughter” and by sharing his house with them, Turveydrop validates burdening Caddy and Prince with “work, [. . .] industr[y], [and] earn[ing] [of] money” to “supply” his “wants” (*BH* 293-4). In denying his real duties toward his son, daughter-in-law Caddy and his dancing school, old Mr. Turveydrop invents for himself a “duty to society” by “show[ing] [him]self about town.” And with this validation of his useless existence as a “model of Deportment” (*BH* 294), Turveydrop affects a “social manner that suggests a class considerable above his actual status” (Page 51).

Although these two characters are excessively dependent on others’ labor, and although Esther expresses clear annoyance with their shameless rhetorical ploys to escape responsibility, these characters could be manifestations of Esther’s desire to relinquish her middle-class status and live a life of aristocratic ease that would allow her to lay aside “diligent work” and exempt herself from her “Duty” (*BH* 19, 76). Thus, in this novel just preceding *Hard Times*, Turveydrop and Skimpole function as a pre-*Hard Times* resistance to “hopeless labour” (*HT* 87). Rhetoric in *Hard Times* indeed expresses resistance through the narrator’s voice, but revises the reprehensible nature of Turveydrop’s and Skimpole’s irresponsibility and argues against the unnatural “madness” and “monoton[y]” of industry that produces “large streets all very like one another [. . .] inhabited by people equally like one another,” who are “set off” from “comforts of life which f[ind] their way all over the world” (*HT* 27-8). Adopting a voice of irony to convey his commentary on the ill effects of excessive work, the narrator undercuts Gradgrindian reasoning by affecting agreement with it and likening Coketown to an imaginative world:

Not that they knew, by name or nature, anything about an Ogre. Fact forbid! I only use the word to express a monster in a lecturing castle, with Heaven knows how many heads manipulated into one, taking childhood captive, and dragging it

into gloomy statistical dens by the hair. (*HT* 16)

In order to champion such overwork, Josiah Bounderby's rhetorical device is to refer to his days as a "vagabond" on the streets (*HT* 24), reminiscent of Mr. Micawber's self-martyring reminders of hardship from uncontrollable "circumstances" (*DC* 755). By pointing out the mistreatment he faced as a youth—"bruises" at "four or five years" and "apprenticed" at "seven year[s] old"—Bounderby justifies the success he enjoys at the expense of overworking "Hands," and "rattl[es] his money" (*HT* 32, 38, 71, 38).

Eccentric's rhetoric in these novels directs its persuasive effects at the notions of work and responsibility, whether to find logical reasons to avoid them at all costs or to advocate endless and "hopeless" amounts of work (*HT* 87). The narrative powers of David, Esther and the anonymous voice of *Hard Times* function collectively to neutralize the extremes. Esther, however, narrating in the central novel, provides the voice of duplicity—strongly denouncing the laziness of Skimpole and Turveydrop and frequently calling herself to "Duty," yet fantasizing about a life of enjoying others' efforts to please her with her fabrication of the "old conspiracy to make [her] happy" (*BH* 437).

Written Language and Literary Achievement

In novels that are so intent on characterizing eccentrics through their relationships to spoken language, mad artists' syntactical manipulations and rhetorical skill must translate to written expression, as extensions of their literarily-minded narrators. From the beginning of David's inclusion of Mr. Dick in his narrative, David relates Mr. Dick's preoccupation with writing the "Memorial about his own history," a Memorial with which Mr. Dick "never ma[kes] the least progress" and which "never would be finished" (*DC* 215, 226). David further describes Mr. Dick, whose full name "Richard Babley" is appropriate for Mr. Dick's unchecked

proliferation of written language—a “confusion of bundles of manuscripts” accompanied by a “number of pens” and a “quantity of ink” in “half-gallon jars” (*DC* 212). These descriptions point directly to Mr. Dick’s insanity, and David himself wonders if he is “out of his mind” (*DC* 214). Defending Mr. Dick, however, Aunt Betsey praises Mr. Dick for the compositional deviation from “business-like” and “worldly” convention, and expresses her perception of his genius: “[N]obody knows what that man’s mind is, except myself!” (*DC* 214-5). Mr. Dick’s unsuccessful completion of his memorial serves David’s purposes of casting himself as the comparatively better “man of letters,” as David enjoys success as a productive and published author. While Wilkins Micawber’s “lofty style of composition” is not exactly literary or autobiographical (*DC* 708), it serves also, through its repetition and solicitation of favors, David’s narrative purposes of self-development that does not include repetitious solicitation of money.³ However, David’s powerlessness against Uriah ultimately necessitates interference from Micawber, whose unconventional relationship to language is the means by which evil is brought to light. Financial irresponsibility aside, Micawber creates the magnum opus of his rhetorical skill, and discloses in a “formal piling up of words” the extent of Uriah Heep’s treacherous “destruction” of Mr. Wickfield (*DC* 758, 761).

In *Bleak House*, the novel that J. Hillis Miller claims “is a document about the interpretation of documents” (Newsome 12), the revision of *David Copperfield*’s eccentricity intensifies and focuses the mad artistry of composition on Krook. Miss Flite, who carries “documents” which “principally [consist] of paper matches and dry lavender” (*BH* 7), necessarily embodies the horror, insanity and delusion wrought from the documentation of Court proceedings, just as Richard’s “confusion [. . .] of [. . .] papers” represents his descent into the Chancery abyss (*BH* 545-8). But Krook’s behavior emphasizes more decidedly the importance of

written language in *Bleak House*, through both his visual recognition and reproduction of letters, such as “JARNDYCE” and “BLEAK HOUSE” and his illiteracy (*BH* 55). Sheila Foor’s analysis of characters’ illiteracy in *Bleak House* examines Jo’s illiteracy as demonstrating his ineptitude for effective articulation and expression. In observing that “language is what separates man from beast, and [that] Jo has no command over this basic tool” (54), Foor aligns herself with the *Bleak House* anonymous narrator’s assessment of Jo’s mental faculties:

It must be a strange state to be like Jo! [. . .] To see people read, and to see people write, [. . .] and to think (for perhaps Jo *does* think, at odd times) what does it all mean, and if it means anything to anybody, how comes it that it means nothing to me? (*BH* 198)

Foor applies her analysis to Krook, whose lack of command over written language invites a questioning of his ability to think: “With Krook, Dickens begins to explore the struggle of becoming literate—not only with the memorization and recognition of individual letters of the alphabet which are the first steps to learning one’s written language, but even with the actual state of mind of the illiterate” (53-4). Krook’s own acknowledgement that “trying to learn [him]self to read and write [. . .] [is] Slow. Bad. [. . .]” and “hard at [his] time of life” suggests ineptitude for effective thought (*BH* 181). Krook’s self-representation of incomprehension of written language allows Esther, whose written narrative is productive and progressive, to be the better “[wo]man of letters,” just as David is the better “man of letters” in comparison with Micawber and Mr. Dick (Saville 787).

However, Krook’s lack of command over conventional language, as shown through his illiteracy, and Miss Flite’s syntactical division, serve as Esther’s narrative tools for expressing her anxiety concerning Chancery and for exercising her ability to withstand its magnetic pull.

Unconventionality encourages poetic license as a way for the mind to resist Chancery, as resistance is unsuccessful through conventional methods. Miss Flite's syntactical division does not destroy her sentences, but suggests that fragments, repetitions and staccato rhythms prime her speech for versification. Arranged into a stanza, a passage of Miss Flite's speech shows a line-by-line progression from an image of nature in decay toward a prospective release from Chancery:

When the leaves are falling from the trees,
 And there are not more flowers in bloom [. . .]
 The vacation is fulfilled.
 And the sixth seal, mentioned in the Revelations
 Again prevails [. . .].
 It will be a good omen for me. (*BH* 48)⁴

Even though Krook never understands what each letter signifies, his use of written language is ingenious and poetic, as well. Only allowing his reader-spectators to see one letter at a time, Krook challenges them to photographically remember letters and consolidate them into whole words. "Without once leaving two letters on the wall together" by "produc[ing] [them] singly, and rubb[ing] them out singly," he builds suspense, as might a poem that reserves important information or a twist for the end (*BH* 55). Krook's "poetry" is thus the most interesting kind; his poems are "mystical document[s]" for both himself and Esther (Oliver 1). Preserving his creativity against impositions of convention, Krook fears that others "might teach [him] wrong!" and is careful not "to lose anything by being learnd wrong now" (*BH* 181). Esther, of course, can only be literarily manipulative through her characterization. But Esther betrays her usual staid manner when explaining to Vholes the nature of the relationship between Ada and Richard, and

lets slip a subtle deviation from her grammatical normalcy and engages in “Flitean” divisive syntactical manipulation of language: “They had been engaged when they were both very young, I told him (a little indignantly), and when the prospect before them was much fairer and brighter. When Richard had not yielded himself to the unhappy influence which now darkened his life” (*BH* 720). With her sentence fragment at the end of her explanation, Esther reveals the effects that Chancery has on herself, expresses her anger at the system’s destruction of Richard’s health, provides a syntactically creative means of resistance, and foreshadows the *Hard Times* narrator’s dominance of linguistic eccentricity.

This narrative dominance of linguistic eccentricity in *Hard Times*’s advances *Bleak House*’s versification. Although it is natural to liken Gradgrindian speech to that of Miss Flite and Krook, since Gradgrind is linguistically repetitive, and thus single-minded and self-aggrandizing in his insistence on “Fact,” Gradgrind can hardly be called an artist, eccentric though he is. And while the circus folk are certainly *Hard Times*’s means of championing creativity, the narrator points out that “the combined literature of the whole [circus] company would have produced but a poor letter on any subject” (*HT* 40). Thus, the *Hard Times* narrator, voicing eccentricity through repetitive speech and grammatical manipulations and by engaging in unconventionality, can argue that “machinery and tall chimneys” equal “madness” and that creativity is normal (*HT* 27). The *Hard Times*’s narrator’s use of linguistic repetition often takes the form of anaphora, using monotonous beginnings of sentences and phrases to emphasize the monotony of Coketown’s industrial life:

It was a town of red brick [. . .]. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys
[. . .]. It had a black canal in it [. . .]. It contained several large streets [. . .]. Then,
came the Teetotal Society [. . .]. Then, came the chemist and the druggist [. . .].

Then, came the experienced chaplain of the jail [. . .]. Then, came Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby, [. . .] both eminently practical. (*HT* 27-9)

The most pointed of the narrator's uses of anaphora is his meta-linguistic emphasis on emphasis, which follows the Gradgrindian emphatic speech on "Fact" and syntactical division with "forefinger" in the novel's first chapter. Providing his own assessment of Gradgrind, the narrator syntactically demonstrates the dulling effects of insistence on "Facts": "The emphasis was helped by the speaker's square wall of a forehead [. . .]. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's mouth [. . .]. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice [. . .]. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair [. . .]" (*HT* 9). The narrator contrasts with this monotonous anaphora by using dashes that break the flow of conventional grammar and syntax to produce erraticism and to show the possibility for creative happiness:

[Sissy], [. . .] trying hard to [. . .] beautify [the] lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights, without which [. . .] stark death [. . .] will be the Writing on the Wall, – she holding this course as part of no fantastic vow, or bond, or brotherhood, or sisterhood or pledge, or covenant, or fancy dress, or fancy fair; but simply as a duty to be done, – did Louisa see these things of herself? These things were to be. (*HT* 287-8)

Whereas Esther attempts to suppress her own eccentricity and express it through the characters, *Hard Times*'s narrator is deliberate and confident in his own creative manipulations, by which he "emphasi[z]es" the necessity of deviating from the norm in order to live a life that is tolerable, and even pleasurable (*HT* 9).

¹ Norman Page cites George Bernard Shaw's observation that in *Hard Times*, "[Dickens] begins at last to exercise quite recklessly the power of presenting a character [. . .] in the most fantastic and outrageous terms, putting into its mouth from one end of the book to the other hardly one word which could conceivably be uttered by any sane human being" (83).

² Alex Woloch suggests that minor characters, given “enough narrative space, [. . .] will emerge as [. . .] unique and coherent individual[s]” usually afforded only to characters who have the privilege of “centrality” (7). His connection between coherence, space and centrality provides useful insight into the eccentrics, who occupy varying amounts of space within Dickens’s narrators’ presentations of plot, but whose coherence or incoherence is questionable because of linguistic manipulation.

³ In the revised Penguin edition of *David Copperfield*, Jeremy Tambling provides information about the “Carlyle[an]” “hero” as “the man of letters” in the endnote for David’s identification of himself as the “hero” (*DC* 943). Additionally Julia Saville mentions Dickens’s “defini[tion] [of] himself as the national conscience and moral guide, [. . .] as a Carlylean ‘Hero as Man of Letters,’” an appropriate observation for an examination of the narrator David as he sets himself in league with and in opposition to Micawber (786).

⁴ Mary Oliver defines free verse as “poetry [that] r[ises] out of a desire for release from the restraints of meter, the measured line, and strict rhyming patterns.” She continues, and claims that poetry can be “spontaneous” and “impulsive,” adjectives that certainly describe Miss Flite’s language (67).

CHAPTER 4

ARTISTIC APTITUDE

Connections: Symbols and Allegory

Narrators' and characters' unconventional relationships to language relate directly to narrators' and eccentrics' aptitude for "connective" devices of symbol, metaphor and allegory. Indicating creativity with their nominal connections between identity and personality, David and Esther as narrators take frequent pains to acknowledge their given names as well as the nicknames other characters have assigned them. These nicknames also indicate their inability or "reluctan[ce] to ascribe" to themselves a set identity (Tambling xxxii). David's nicknames—"Davy," "Doady," "Daisy" and "Trot"—are both diminutive and emasculating. "Daisy" and "Trot" work alongside his male anxiety resulting from his upbringing as the would-be niece of his gender-bending Aunt Betsey Trotwood and from comparing himself to the older and more charismatic schoolmate, Steerforth. "Davy" and "Doady," restrictively youthful, work alongside his anxiety about coming-of-age. Similarly, Esther's nicknames—"Dame Durden" and "Little Woman"—are diminutive, but serve her ostensible self-effacement. They also suggest premature age and deprivation of youthful femininity, and thus serve her gender consciousness and female anxiety. The narrators of these two novels, who connect their own names to their sense of identity (or lack thereof), extend the act of nominal connection between identity and personality to the eccentrics they characterize.¹ That eccentric characters' names often indicate function and register upon readers' sense of the absurd is obvious, as they are a feature of Dickens's "specialized [. . .] linguistic inventiveness" (Page 87).² *David Copperfield* presents readers with

the “creatives” Mr. Dick and Wilkins Micawber, and even Betsey Trotwood, whose names seem too ordinary to belong to characters of eccentric proportion. However, like David’s diminutive nicknames, “Mr. Dick” is the diminutive form of that character’s full name, “Richard Babley,” a form that represents what Saville terms Mr. Dick’s “refus[al] to use his proper name” as a “refus[al]” of his “place” in the world’s “disorder” (788). Micawber’s occasional signing of his money-soliciting letters with “W. M.,” rather than with his full name, indicates his questionable adult identity, since he fosters a strangely familiar relationship to David, who is very much his junior. The initials also suggest at least a small sense of shame at his impecuniousness (*DC* 789). Both of these manipulations on the part of these characters and their narrators are congruous with eccentricity. Uriah Heep’s name, showing the deliberate misspelling of the noun, *heap*, heighten the effect of absurdity, as do Traddles and Mowcher.

In *Bleak House*, a revision of *David Copperfield*, names for eccentrics become more ridiculous. While some eccentrics’ names simply indicate unconventionality, *Bleak House*’s mad artists’ names—Flite, Krook, Turveydrop and Skimpole—indicate the function and even action of eccentricity. The names of Krook and Flite have obvious allegorical meaning as reflective of disposition and relevance to plot; Krook’s personality borders on malice, and Miss Flite’s amiable personality primes her for taking “flight” from the confines of Chancery. The names of Turveydrop and Skimpole, on the other hand, contain verbs—*Turveydrop* and *Skimpole*—in keeping with the two-by-two division of the mad artists that is also apparent in their usage of language. The verbs contained in the names of the latter, “Drop” and “Skim,” are at best a slight indication of the action Turveydrop and Skimpole perform in the novel. To “Drop” and “Skim” could denote these characters’ perfunctory or unsuccessful accomplishment of tasks. But as *Hard Times* presents a continued revision of eccentricity from *Bleak House* and *David Copperfield*,

Hard Times naturally marks a change in Dickensian naming of eccentrics. Eccentricity is something one *is*, and increasingly becomes something one *does*. For *Bounderby*, M'Choakumchild and Gradgrind, the suppressive action conveyed in their names is clear and appropriate for their function in the novel's plot. Mr. Sleary, who figures questionably as an eccentric, has a name that suggests just that. To "Sleary" is Dickens's inventive conflation of two verbs indicating Mr. Sleary's slurred speech and smeared distinction as either "creatively sane" or "mundanely insane."

In none of these cases is nominal indication of eccentricity (whether by noun or verb) achieved by exact spelling. Ever playful, Dickens manipulates the visual appearance of names, so that readers must work harder to associate names with representative meaning, function and identity. The eccentrics in these novels, as extensions of the narrators' preoccupations, create representations of their sense of reality, and exhibit an aptitude for one-to-one correlation between names and meanings. Mr. Micawber, in *David Copperfield*, identifies the "debasement circumstances" he believes himself a victim of—"Ignominy, Want, Despair and Madness"—capitalizing them allegorically (DC 755). In disclosing Uriah Heep's treachery, Micawber delivers a proliferating repetition of the name of "HEEP," printed in all caps and pronounced (in David's mind) with "vehemence," rendering Uriah's surname an allegory that is an "accumulation" of "infamy" and all the other allegorical nouns Micawber lists (DC 755). Just as Micawber's unconventional relationship to language and aptitude for allegorical representation are the means by which he can reveal and chastise moral corruption, Mr. Dick is similarly able to call evil by its representative name. Expressing his "great disturbance and agitation" in an "allegorical way," by referring to his "sense of [. . .] unkindness" as "the date [. . .] when King

Charles the First had his head cut off,” Mr. Dick shows his need for a one-to-one correlation between his own personal tragedy and that of an English monarch (*DC* 212-5).

The revision of eccentricity and naming across the novels shows again that *Bleak House*, with its two-by-two division of nominal nouns and verbs, balances its eccentricity between that of *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*. *Bleak House*'s mad artist eccentrics, as extensions of the Esther's preoccupations, are able to express their sense of reality through self-representation. Just as Micawber's allegorical connection of "HEEP" with evil contributes to David Copperfield's own personal development, Turveydrop's and Skimpole's allegorical representations contribute to Esther's sense of her own usefulness. "Deportment" for Turveydrop produces nothing other than "Deportment" (*BH* 169). Skimpole's ascription of allegorical qualities to his daughters, "Beauty," "Sentiment" and "Comedy," demonstrates his immersion in unproductive creativity and his extension of destitution to his children, who, like their father, have no "idea of time or money" (*BH* 526). But for Miss Flite and Krook, who face the direst of circumstances—the machinations and destruction of a court system as a graduation of Uriah Heep's deception that Mr. Micawber and others face—the mere indulgence in representation can provide escape. Miss Flite's repetitious speech, indicating her single-mindedness, is also what reveals her aptitude for symbol, as she transcends the everyday to lend allegorical significance to human existence: "The wards in Jarndyce! [. . .] It's a good omen for youth, and hope, and beauty, when they find themselves in this place, and don't know what's to come of it" (*BH* 34). Here, Miss Flite symbolizes a connection in the form of allegorical labels for these otherwise ordinary young persons, as representative of her summation of each of them: Richard is "youth," Esther is "hope," and Ada, of course, is "beauty." Miss Flite lends symbolic significance not only to the wards, but also to the Court, by referencing the Biblical book of Revelation to describe Court

dealings: “I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. I have discovered that the sixth seal mentioned in the Revelation is the Great Seal. It has been open a long time!” (*BH* 34).

Similarly, Krook’s unconventional command over spoken language affords him the power to analyze and visually represent his perceptions of Chancery. Reveling in being known as “the Lord Chancellor,” and reveling in his shop’s likeness to “Chancery,” Krook asserts his aptitude for symbols:

You see I have so many things here [. . .] wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that’s why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all’s fish that comes to my net. And I can’t abear to part with anything I once lay hold of (or so my neighbours think [. . .]) or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That’s the way I’ve got the ill name of Chancery. (*BH* 50-1)

The “neighbours” association between Chancery’s trap of wasteful inefficiency with Krook’s shop is understandable, but Krook shows that he is a step ahead of others in his thinking. Unlike the Court of Chancery, which expands its infectious touch to so many lives, Krook’s microcosm of the Court is confined to his own space. Even the name of his shop, the “Rag and Bottle Warehouse,” attests to its representative and confining nature, contrasting with Chancery’s contagion. “Rag” suggests an association with Chancery’s grime, decay and destruction and “Bottle” suggests Krook’s ability or desire for containment of life and legality: “In all parts of the window [are] quantities of dirty bottles,” as well as “law books, [. . .] papers, [. . .] old iron, [. . .] and rusty keys,” and “several second-hand bags” (*BH* 48-9). Krook’s fraternal pairing of his identity with that of the real Lord Chancery further demonstrates his advancement beyond

others' associations: "I go to see my noble and learned brother pretty well everyday, when he sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice him. There's no great odds betwixt us. We both grub on in a muddle." Here, Krook points out what he believes to be the Lord Chancellor's dull perception in not noticing him (*BH* 50-1), a dullness that enables Krook's eventual "Cunning" evasion of the system (*BH* 758). Additionally, upon discovering that Miss Flite's "young friends are the wards in Jarndyce," Krook recalls names that he has heard in Court—"Carstone, [. . .] Clare"—showing that he "knows as much of the cause as the real salaried Chancellor" (*BH* 51). Particularly useful to Esther is Krook's keen recollection of the names of "Barbary, [. . .] and Dedlock," holding the key to her dubious identity that causes her so much anxiety (*BH* 51).

While Krook's contained mimicry of Chancery shows the Court's infectious power through his collection of decaying and corroding objects, Miss Flite shows her perception of the Court's power of consumption by equating it to the carnivorous and "greedy" hunger of Lady Jane, her defense against which is a representation of imprisonment and release of "twenty" birds: "I began to keep the little creatures [. . .] with the intention of restoring them to liberty. When my judgment should be given. Ye-es! They die in prison, though. Their lives, poor silly things, are so short in comparison with Chancery proceedings, that, one by one, the whole collection has died over and over again. I doubt, do you know, whether one of these, though they are all young, will live to be free!" (*BH* 53-4). As further evidence of Miss Flite's aptitude for symbols, the birds, like the "wards," are bestowed with allegorical names: "Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon and Spinach" (*BH* 180). These allegorical names figure similarly to the way Krook's items figure in *Bleak House*. Just as the sacks of ladies' hair, and bones and kitchen-stuff represent various aspect of humanity, each

allegorical bird name represents an aspect of human existence in a state of caged imprisonment. And just as the items in Krook's shop are subject to corrosion and decay, the birds are subject to being consumed by Lady Jane. Miss Flite's "giv[ing] her birds their liberty" once Jarndyce and Jarndyce dissolves fulfills their representation of providing escape, despite Krook's prediction that "the birds that have never been caged would kill 'em" (*BH* 763, 180). For Miss Flite, who represents herself by naming a bird "Madness," escape is possible as her own allegorical name suggests. But for Richard, represented by "Death," escape is not possible. Krook, also represented allegorically by "Madness" as well as by "Cunning," does evade Chancery but does not escape the horrors of his "spontaneous combustion" (*BH* 403), and the finality of being "Ashes" (*BH* 180).

Allegory in *Hard Times* is most often "Fact" and "Fancy," the novel's nouns of choice for conventionality and eccentricity. However, these allegorical representations of characters and circumstances function only to bifurcate existence into two categories, exemplified by "one half of the children" in Mr. M'Choakumchild's class wanting to "paper a room with representations of horses" and the "other half" rejecting this idea (*HT* 12-3). Much like Turveydrop's and Skimpole's useless acts of representation in *Bleak House*, Gradgrind's constant allegorizing of characters and circumstances "Fact" and "Fancy" produces nothing. But showing the continuation of Miss Flite's, Krook's, Micawber's and Mr. Dick's representations of their sense of reality as a means of resistance or escape, Sissy Jupe and Louisa Gradgrind, as two of *Hard Times*'s "sane artists," find ways to represent their senses of reality in order to face hardship. The introduction of Sissy Jupe's character shows her "fancy" to align herself with the "half of the children" who would "paper a room with representations of horses" and her additional desire to "carpet [a] room [. . .] with representations of flowers" (*HT* 12-14). Even though Sissy's delight

in representation is cut short by Bounderby's admonishment "never to fancy" and his aggrandizement of "Fact, fact, fact" (*HT* 14), Sissy finds escape, or rather hope, by materially representing her devotion to her father's prospective return with a bottle of "nine oils" meant to soothe his "little hurt" (*HT* 64). Louisa's engagement in escapist representation is possible because of her keen vision, as she "look[s]" into spaces of delight and out of places of confinement, with a "remarkabl[y] [. . .] intense and searching character" (*HT* 20). Just as the narrator introduces Sissy's character with an immediate emphasis on her "fancy" (*HT* 12), Louisa immediately demonstrates her own visionary acumen, as her first action is "to peep in at the hidden glories of the [circus]" (*HT* 18). Although Gradgrind cuts Louisa's "peep[ing]" short, as he does Sissy's delight in representative horses and flowers, Louisa harbors a "starved imagination" that is a "light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn" (*HT* 18-19). Finding outlets through abstracted gazes out of windows "without looking at anything" concrete and through her fascination with "looking at [. . .] fire," where she "seem[s] find more to look at in it than ever [her brother] could find," Louisa evades her father's restraint (*HT* 26, 56).

Hard Times's continuation of the preceding novels' use of connections, symbols, representations of reality and allegory as ways for characters to escape hardship calls attention to the implied action of eccentricity, as an extension of its existence. Whether the "mad artists" face the machinations of malice, the destruction of a court system or the suppression of natural inclinations toward "Fancy," their creation of outlets for themselves asserts that eccentricity becomes increasingly something one is as well as something one *does*, as the noun-to-verb evolution of characters' names suggests. The *Hard Times* narrator furthers this notion of eccentricity as something one does by referring to the space of his narrative responsibility and the space of the "Dear reader[']s" responsibility as "two fields of action" (*HT* 288). Even though

Hard Times voices an explicit call for eccentric action, eccentricity's action in *Bleak House*, through its subtlety and peripheral position, is the strongest and most vital in its power, as later chapters in this thesis will examine.

¹ Alex Woloch argues that there is always a “tension between the authenticity of a character in-an-of-himself and the reduction of the character into the thematic or symbolic field” (15).

² J. Hillis Miller's Introduction to the Penguin English Library edition of *Bleak House* asserts that the metaphorical names of the characters “reveal the fact that they are not real people or even copies of real people (Newsome 13), and Woloch similarly argues that “characters merely resemble humans but are *not* humans” (14-15).

CHAPTER 5

ECCENTRICITY AS PERFORMANCE

Appearance and Gesture

Although J. Hillis Miller's argument that characters "exist only in language" necessitates beginning a study of eccentricity by closely reading narrative voice and the character's language (Newsome 13), it is also important to examine narrative representations of these characters' visual presences as indicators of "the disjunction between surface and depth" (Woloch 160). Just as words, sentences, speech, rhetoric and literary composition burst forth from the confines of eccentrics' peripheral positions and exterior flatness, the eccentrics' bodies must also imply and extend the excesses of interiority, further showing that eccentricity is something one *does*. As the revision of *David Copperfield*'s Tommy Traddles, Miss Mowcher, Betsey Trotwood and Uriah Heep, who present a whirl of "porcupine"-like hair standing "upright," "dwarf[ish]" bodily form, gender-bending attire and "inflexibility" and "cadaverous[ness]" (*DC* 597, 335, 204, 229), Miss Flite and Krook present the most erratic appearance of the mad artists in *Bleak House*.

Miss Flite's "squeezed bonnet," "reticule" and "documents" are such frequent and obvious signifiers of the old woman's "curious" madness—characterized as containment of slight disarray—that they become stylized even after one or two encounters with her (*BH* 34). These descriptions serve also as an extension of Miss Flite's living space, which Esther describes as a "bare" room with the "scantiest necessities" (*BH* 53). Esther's use of "curious" and her descriptions of Miss Flite indicate Chancery's destruction, and foreshadow Chancery's damage to Richard Carstone, whose initial youth and proximity to Esther demonstrate, even more than

with Miss Flite, the dangers of a connection to the system. According to Esther's observations, Richard becomes "thin and languid, slovenly in his dress, abstracted in his manner," and exhibits "restlessless" (*BH* 722). Much like Miss Flite who loses "youth and hope," and "beauty" through connection to Chancery (*BH* 34), Richard shows a similar loss: "There is a ruin of youth and youthful beauty like age; and into such a ruin Richard's youth and youthful beauty had all fallen away" (*BH* 722).

While Miss Flite (and eventually Richard) is shabby and document-laden despite her desire for "genteel appearance[s]," Krook seems to revel in his peculiar and off-putting appearance. The "old man in spectacles," Esther observes, is "short, cadaverous, and withered; with his head sunk sideways between his shoulders, [. . .] and his throat, chin, and eyebrows were so frosted with white hairs, and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin, that he looked [. . .] like some old root in a fall of snow" (*BH* 49). Like Miss Flite's appearance, Krook's appearance evidences the damage he has suffered as a result of his willful connection to Chancery. His small size and "cadaverous[ness]" amalgamate the physical traits of Miss Mowcher and Uriah Heep. Additionally, Krook's perceptiveness, advancing Miss Mowcher's "magnifying glass" view and Uriah Heep's "subtle [. . .] watchful[ness]," (*DC* 339, 376), attests to old man's importance to *Bleak House*, as he is a seer of connections, and a "cadaverous[ness]" instrument of plot (*BH* 49).

The contrasting appearances of Turveydrop and Skimpole, who present the opposite of Miss Flite's and Krook's visual erraticism, are nonetheless "curious[ly]" eccentric, and further attest to the two-by-two division of mad artistry in *Bleak House* (*BH* 73). Prefiguring Esther's depiction of the appearances of Turveydrop and Skimpole is David's depiction of Steerforth, who is the "figure of a handsome well-formed young man, dressed with a tasteful easy

negligence” (DC 296). Skimpole, having “more the appearance [. . .] of a damaged young man,” cultivates “an easy negligence in his manner, and even in his dress,” as “his hair [is] carelessly disposed, and his neck-kerchief loose and flowing,” and likens himself to “artists [who] paint their own portraits” (*BH* 65). Esther’s addition that she “could not separate from [his appearance] the idea of a romantic youth who had undergone some unique process of depreciation” comments harshly on Skimpole’s cultivated youthfulness and carelessness that she associates with wastefulness (*BH* 65). Likewise, Turveydrop’s appearance as a “model of Deportment” shows the same dedication to cultivating his exterior (*BH* 171). However, unlike Skimpole, who represents age under the guise of youth, Turveydrop is “not like youth, he [is] not like age, he [is] not like anything in the world but a model of Deportment” (*BH* 171). Such externality, Page argues, evidences “moral hollowness” (85). In terms of the personas these two eccentrics put forth, cultivation means no Flite-and-Krook-like disturbance in Esther’s line of vision. Similarly to the way Steerforth’s appearance represents David’s burden of admiring Steerforth for his attractiveness and charisma and disdaining him for his arrogance and careless treatment of others’ affections, cultivation in extreme forms is troublesome for Esther, who must assist those whom Turveydrop and Skimpole exploit—Caddy and Richard, respectively.

Just as eccentrics’ speech indicates unconventionality, eccentrics’ “gesture[s] [arise] when speech has failed,” signaling a deviation from the norm that matches the Dickensian disturbance in eccentrics’ personal spaces and appearances (Woloch 167). Prefigured by Aunt Betsey’s head twitches and followed by Gradgrind’s “emphasi[s]” of “observations by underscoring every sentence” with his “forefinger” (*HT* 9), those “ceremon[ious]” curtsseys with which Miss Flite punctuates sentences are a function of Esther’s distortions of description (*BH* 34). Despite their strangeness, the curtsseys are no cause for other characters’ alarm. Other

eccentrics' gestures, however, in all three novels, clearly indicate eccentrics' potential to disrupt the narrator's sense of safety. Often, in these cases, Dickens's characterization incites a question of eccentrics' humanity. Early in his narrative, David describes Mr. Dick as having a "florid [. . .] pleasant-looking gentleman[ly]" appearance." But Mr. Dick's first gestures in David's memory are "shut[ting] one eye in a grotesque manner, [. . .] nodd[ing] his head [. . .] sh[aking] it at [David], [. . .] and laugh[ing]" (*DC* 200). David's reaction, as a result of his "protagonist[ic] inability to understand" (Woloch 173), is to "suspect [Mr. Dick] of being a little mad" (*DC* 205). Eventually, in David's mind, Mr. Dick's "friendl[iness] and amenab[ility]" allow him human status, although Aunt Betsey undercuts that humanity by labeling Mr. Dick a "creature" (*DC* 214). In contrast, David's description of Uriah Heep, who "writh[es] when he want[s] to express enthusiasm" (*DC* 245), and whose watchfulness is likened to that of "an ugly and rebellious genie" (*DC* 752), associates this character with a snake, associations that are appropriate for Uriah's deceptive scheming and his threat to David's security and centrality within the narrative.¹

In *Bleak House*, Krook is an obvious carry-over for eccentricity's association with the sub-human, as his behavior is similar to the behavior of Lady Jane, his cat that frequently "appear[s] with [him] [. . .] at his heels" (*BH* 179). Despite his illiteracy and obvious insanity, Krook demonstrates his exceptional mental faculties with his animal behavior. Ever watchful, wary and distrustful, like Lady Jane, Krook responds to what goes on around him with feline quickness and perception, "dart[ing] [. . .] sudden look[s]," and then "shr[inking] into [himself] as suddenly as he [leaps] out of it" (*BH* 50). Other times, Krook acts with "caution and indecision," while assessing others' association with Chancery (*BH* 181). With Jarndyce, Krook seems "tormented by an inclination to enter upon some secret subject, which he [cannot] make

up his mind to approach,” with a “countenance and manner” suggesting “a perpetual impulse to do something he could not resolve to venture on.” Engaging in his aptitude for connections, Krook watches Jarndyce “incessant[ly],” with a “curious expression of a sense of power,” and “scan[s] every lineament of [Jarndyce’s] face” (*BH* 181). Even though Miss Flite’s character does not match Krook’s borderline malice, Esther’s description of Miss Flite’s movements with bird-like placement of “her head on one side,” and her description of “the little old lady’s [. . .] remarkably quick [. . .] hearing,” doom her to the same sub-human existence to which Krook is doomed (*BH* 47). But as with Krook, Miss Flite’s likeness to the animals with which she most closely associates further attests to her ability to represent and resist evil, as well as provide the means of escape from it.

Hard Times continues the questioning of eccentrics’ humanity through descriptions of appearance and gesture, likening characters to machines as well as to animals. Bounderby’s reduction of workers to “Hands” functions as synecdoche, summing up existence with occupation (*HT* 71). Similarly, Gradgrind, whose “obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders” and “very neckcloth” reduce him to “a stubborn fact,” extends his dehumanization of self to his students through a pedagogical serialization, just as the town’s workers are dehumanized to “body number one [. . .] body number two” (*HT* 53). Sissy Jupe as “girl number twenty,” is rendered with all the others as nothing more than an object—one of many “little pitchers [. . .] to be filled so full of facts” (*HT* 9-10). While this dehumanizing serialization works to Sissy’s disadvantage, as her human capacity for thought and feeling is reduced to her incapacity for mechanical rote memorization and recalling of fact, *Hard Times*’s depiction of the circus folk, who are numbered in general “two[s] or three[s]” and “eight[s] and nine[s],” achieves just the opposite (*HT* 40). Like eccentrics in earlier novels, they convey their

unconventional personalities through their appearances and gestures. However, *Hard Times*'s eccentrics' natural erraticism is another demonstration of Dickens's normalization of creativity as a contrast to Turveydrop's and Skimpole's cultivation of beauty in *Bleak House*, the hard-edged squareness of Gradgrind and Bounderby, and the abnormal erraticism in both *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*. Mr. E. W. B. Childers and Master Kidderminster have the most conspicuous bodies and faces in *Hard Times*. Their disproportion, as a result of physical exertion, kinesthetic grace and theatricality, strikes readers immediately. Mr. Childers, as the performer of a "daring vaulting act," is endowed with "legs [that are] very robust, but shorter than legs of good proportion should have been," as well as a "chest and back [that are] much too broad, as his legs were too short" (*HT* 34). Accompanying Mr. Childers, Master Kidderminster is a "diminutive boy with an old face"—a perfect "Cupid"—whose appearance indicates useful performative effect and a possible maturity of mind in spite of his "diminutive" stature (*HT* 35). Even though the erraticism of these circus performers marks their contrast to the mechanization of industry and education in Coketown, Bounderby demonstrates the impulse to reduce circus life to its occupational motion by dehumanizing Sissy Jupe to the mere status of "tumbling-girl" (*HT* 48). As Bounderby perceives circumstances, Sissy Jupe's association with the circus is no less synecdochical than are his "Hands[?]" association with industry (*HT* 71). Further depicting the seemingly questionable humanity of these creative circus folk is Dickens's familiar and fail-proof connection of character to animal. The circus folk walk "with their legs wider apart than the general run of men [. . .] [as] common to all the male members of Sleary's company," and demonstrate "that they were always on horseback" (*HT* 38). Uniting and leading them all, as well as connecting creative sanity with the mundane insanity of *Hard Times*'s world beyond the circus, Sleary, as his "verbed" name suggests, slurs and smears the distinction between the two

types of eccentricity in the novel. Mr. Sleary, a circus figure with “one fixed eye and one loose eye” and with a liminal state of mind between sobriety and drunkenness, positions himself centrally among the “members of the company [. . .] exactly as he would have stood in the centre of the ring during [. . .] performance” (*HT* 40-4). With this mental and physical liminality and his centrality to the other circus performers, Mr. Sleary hinges between stability and tenuousness, and exemplifies both the confrontation of hardship and escape from it.

Whereas eccentric appearance and gesture in *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* indicate “the disjunction between surface and depth” in terms of the interiority of characters (Woloch 160), the appearance of the *Hard Times* creatives—disproportioned bodies, theatrical clothing and even wizened faces—and their gestures of performance—“danc[ing],” building “pyramid[s]” of men and “catch[ing] knives and balls”—evidence a confluence of exteriority and interiority (*HT* 40). In addition, these characters’ near indecency of “showing their legs” and the unashamedness of a young woman who is “in the family way” point to their acceptance and enjoyment of their own natural humanity: “There was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another” (*HT* 40-1). A revision of the childish, gentle and careless Mr. Dick and Skimpole, these peripheral circus folk combine these traits of their predecessors and make them useful to Sissy Jupe’s centrality when her father leaves town: “The basket packed in silence, they brought her bonnet to her, and smoothed her disordered hair, [. . .] then pressed about her, and bent over her in very natural attitudes, kissing and embracing her” (*HT* 44).

As with other attributes of *Hard Times*’s eccentricity examined in this study, it is obvious with the circus folks’ confluence of exteriority and interiority, and the conflation of eccentric characters from the previous novels, that *Hard Times*’s creativity is normalized and even

idealized, since aspects of creative existence are both natural and pleasant. These creatives, like Sissy Jupe and Louisa Gradgrind, suggest their own psychological depth, and show yet again the advancement in representations of eccentricity in *Hard Times*. From *David Copperfield* to *Bleak House* to *Hard Times*, the interiority of eccentricity exists in varying capacities, as products of the controlling agendas of narrators' own consciousnesses.

¹ Alex Woloch discusses the eccentrics' potential, but unsuccessful, power to "wrest attention away from any privileged, central figure," because of their distortions (Woloch 143). This potential power is especially the case with Uriah Heep, whose pervasive presence in David's narrative is marked by his threat to David's (and others') finances and friendship with Agnes Wickfield. Chapter LII of *David Copperfield*, "I Assist at an Explosion," puts the spotlight on Uriah and Micawber, and takes attention away from David, who's little more than an observer in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF ECCENTRICITY

Interiority and Exteriority

Alex Woloch's examination of minor characters' existence in protagonists' spaces and narratives asserts that minor characters are byproducts of the central narration, allowing them only "[partial] represent[ation]" (246). More specifically, Woloch notes that the consciousnesses of the minor characters serve as the narrator's "artistic externalization of consciousness" (279). A work's collection of consciousnesses—narrator's, protagonist's and minor characters'—are "incorporated" (Woloch 246). Thus, in the three novels under my consideration, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, eccentricity is a device that suits the narrative agendas of David, Esther and the *Hard Times* anonymous narrator. The variances of the questionable omniscience of third-person narration, along with the first-person narrator's involvement with events and inability to gain access into characters' interiority, necessitate characterizing eccentricity as distorted exteriority. Still, it is possible to make assertions about eccentrics' interiority, not only through an intimate examination of exteriority, as this thesis has shown, but also through analysis of narrative representation of consciousness.

In *David Copperfield*, the interiority of eccentrics, as it would be represented by a third-person omniscient narrator's psycho-narration,¹ is unknowable through David's limited perspective as a character in his own tale (Keen 60). Aunt Betsey's head "twitch[es]" function not only to divide and punctuate sentences, but also to reflect interiority, "as if her old wrongs were working within her" (*DC* 19). It is obvious, however, that David's assessment of interiority

is conjecture, because “as if” stands as a qualifier (*DC* 19). Toward the end of David’s narrative, Betsey’s exterior rigidity is complemented by her under-the-breath stream of commentary expressive of her wit and annoyance. David’s punctuation characterizes the altered states of his aunt’s consciousness by relegating under-the-breath commentary to parentheses. Most notable are Aunt Betsey’s comments about Mrs. Markleham’s relentless interruptions of the reconciliation between Dr. and Mrs. Strong. In response to Mrs. Markleham’s interjection that she “ha[s] mentioned the fact [of having brought Dr. and Mrs. Strong together], fifty times to everybody,” Aunt Betsey “mutter[s],” according to David, “(Then hold your tongue, for the Lord’s sake and don’t mention it anymore!)” (*DC* 667). Betsey’s wit hits the mark, as she takes note of Mrs. Markleham’s unnecessary reminders of her involvement in her daughter’s marriage. However, David hides this evidence of Betsey’s lucidity within the confines of punctuation, so that only those in her immediate vicinity, namely David himself, can hear.

As with Aunt Betsey’s interiority, David can only conjecture about Mr. Dick’s interiority by providing descriptions of exteriority: “Mr. Dick made his two hands revolve very fast about each other a great number of times, and then rolled them over and over one another, to express confusion” (*DC* 659). Despite Mr. Dick’s inability here to verbally convey his belief about his state of mind, Mr. Dick follows his kinesthetic demonstration of interiority by asserting that he is “weak” and by qualifying his own consciousness: “I am simple” (*DC* 659). Saville discusses scenes in *David Copperfield* such as this one, in which eccentric characters experience a “revelation” about or “expos[e]” their unconventionality, and then “acknowledge their oddity to be a guise” (785). In Aunt Betsey’s mind, Saville observes, Mr. Dick’s madness “is a pose,” a “pretense of idiocy” (788). Whether this is true, or whether Mr. Dick’s madness is simply acknowledged and authentic, Saville asserts that Mr. Dick’s and other eccentrics’ “self-

awareness” is “the trademark of Dickensian eccentricity,” and that they make themselves “the ally or guarantor of sincerity or sincerity’s Victorian counterpart, earnestness” (785).

In other passages of his narrative, David makes use of free indirect discourse² and quoted monologue³ techniques to conflate his consciousness with that of characters, showing “Dickens’s fascination with paradoxical and double states of consciousness” (Newsome 117). But rather than functioning as attempts to render the characters’ interiors more knowable, David’s use of these techniques renders himself more knowable. Thus, David serves his agendas of self-discovery and self-development. Omitting quotation marks and tagging,⁴ and speaking of himself in the third person, David conflates his consciousness with that of the Misses Spenlow who agree in a letter to meet with him concerning his engagement to Dora. These narrative techniques afford David the opportunity to express his anxiety about his engagement, and to flatter himself by acknowledging the Spenlows’ congeniality:

They presented their compliments to Mr. Copperfield, [. . .] [and] that if Mr. Copperfield would do them the favor to call, [. . .] they would be happy to hold some conversation on the subject. (*DC* 596)

The same narrative manipulation of consciousness is useful for David’s remembrance of his first dinner party, which ends in everyone’s intoxication. To characterize this event, David alters his narrative mode of representing speech and action, in order to know his own altered state of consciousness more fully:

Grainger on my right hand, Markham on my left, and Steerforth opposite—all sitting in a mist, and a long way off. The theatre? To be sure. The very thing. Come along! But they must excuse me if I saw everybody out first, and turned the lamp off—in case of fire. (*DC* 367)

Here again, there are no quotation marks or tagging of who says or thinks what. But readers are to assume that the last sentence of the passage represents David's memory of his own contribution to this conversation. Combining his narrative retrospection with his effort to recreate the immediacy of the dinner-party situation, David enables himself to better qualify his own personal development, as he does with the letter from the Misses Spenlow. And by temporarily pushing speculation about the nature of other characters to the periphery, David maintains centrality.

Unknowable interiority, of course, is a feature of the eccentrics in *Bleak House*, as Esther shows with Krook, whose mad artistry figures significantly in the plot of the novel. Using the same qualifier, "as if," Esther conjectures about Krook's suspicious, vital and volatile interior and hints at his literal volatility by describing his "breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within" (*BH* 49). But both the *Bleak House* omniscient narrator and Esther make occasional use of free-indirect discourse and quoted monologue as narrative avenues into interiority, such that perception of the eccentric characters continually alternates in and out of their minds, just as the narrative perspective itself alternates between questionable omniscience of the third-person and subjective conjecture of Esther's first-person. That the anonymous narrator in *Bleak House* varies his modes of narration is not a surprise, as this variance is a function of his irony and flirtations with omniscience. Pointing out the legal system's failings, the anonymous narrator leaves off tags and quotation marks to conflate his consciousness with that of Jo—whose interiority the narrator himself questions—and that of the powers who conduct an investigation into the death of "Nemo." The "preliminary paces" result in an unsuccessful gathering of information in which questions and answers are virtually indistinguishable:

Name, Jo. Nothing else he knows on. Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heard of sich a think. Don't know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for *him*. *He* don't find no fault with it. Spell it? No. *He* can't spell it. [. . .]. (BH 134)

Esther similarly conflates her consciousness with Turveydrop and Skimpole to point out their ineptitude. For Turveydrop, Esther drops quotation marks, but keeps the tagging—"He asked me, first of all, whether I conferred a charm and a distinction on London by residing in it?"—and emphasizes Turveydrop's preoccupation with the general subject of Deportment (BH 174). With Skimpole, whom she claims she "really never underst[ands]," Esther's narrative technique emphasizes seeming "carelessness" with money:

Well, he said, here he was! He had been bilious, but rich men were often bilious, and therefore he had been persuading himself that he was a man of property. So he was, in a certain point of view—in his expansive intentions. He had been enriching his medical attendant in the most lavish manner. He had always doubled, and sometimes quadrupled, his fees. [. . .]. (BH 183-4)

Unlike David, who renders *himself* more knowable through free-indirect discourse and quoted monologue, Esther uses these techniques to understand the eccentrics' consciousnesses. Even so, these narrative techniques are indirect ways of knowing herself as well; the eccentrics serve Esther's dire need to re-inscribe herself through others' deportment and carelessness as a remedy for self-effacement, a need that David does not share.

Esther's narrative stands as an avenue into the interiority of eccentric characters. Her perception, manipulation and recording of their speech and behavior to represent psychological realism indicate characters' insanity. Unlike Miss Flite and Krook, Mr. Turveydrop and Mr.

Skimpole are not termed insane within the pages of *Bleak House*. But all these mad artists are dysfunctional, having retreated into their respective worlds of documents, rags and bottles, deportment and beauty. Their dysfunctions are also products of having irreversibly deceived themselves. Miss Flite believes that she engages in a “great deal of thought” (BH 47), and Krook believes he will one day “learn [him]self to read and write” (BH 181). Whether Skimpole and Turveydrop have deceived themselves with their own rhetoric is questionable, however. Skimpole’s self-deception is especially questionable, as Esther’s acknowledgment of his “treacher[y]” suggests that he knows the difference between right and wrong (BH 682). Despite the self-deception of Miss Flite, Krook, Skimpole and Turveydrop, these eccentrics, like those in *David Copperfield*, demonstrate “self-awareness” of their oddities (Saville 785). Miss Flite admits to her sense of incapacity, as she acknowledges while “touching her forehead” her tendency toward being a “little rambling” (BH 438). But she forgets her own insanity by “condescending” to indicate that Krook “is very odd [. . .], a little—you know!—M—!” and to explain his eccentric representation of Chancery as evidence of his madness: “He is called among the neighbours the Lord Chancellor, [. . .] and his shop is called the Court of Chancery” (BH 49-50). Like Miss Flite, Krook demonstrates self-awareness, and agrees with Miss Flite’s assessment of his mental state, even though he does not know what “M” stands for: “It’s true enough. [. . .] That’s why they call me the Lord Chancellor, and my shop Chancery” (BH 50). Similarly, Skimpole admits to being “a confiding child” (BH 67), and Turveydrop sets himself apart from others by aligning himself with the genteel elite: “We are few” (BH 175). With this self-awareness of its eccentrics, *Bleak House*, like *David Copperfield*, shows the paradoxical nature of eccentric sincerity. If these fabrications of persona are indeed fabrications, however sincerely or earnestly admitted, they signal a deviation from the ambiguous “truth” of their “real”

selves, not only as products of Esther's inflected characterization, but also as products of eccentrics' need to attract attention. Their consciousness of being eccentric further bespeaks the creativity of Miss Flite, Krook, Skimpole and Turveydrop, and is thus a requisite trait of the mad artist subcategory.

In keeping with the progression these novels show, the narration in *Hard Times* alternates between rendering characters' interiors "unknowable" and entering characters' minds. In all cases, the narrator provides descriptions of exteriority. Louisa Gradgrind, the nearly impenetrable fortress of thought and feeling, articulates in Gradgrind's presence the fiery nature of her own interiority, which becomes *Hard Times's* symbol for creativity as normalized eccentricity: "There seems to be nothing there, but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, father!" (*HT* 99). As Gradgrind believes she is describing merely the sights outside her window, Louisa articulates her interior feelings more for herself and for the reader than for her father. The *Hard Times* narrator's initial descriptions of Gradgrind keep readers at arms length from his interior, but still comments on what may lie inside: "[. . .] his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside" (*HT* 9). Although the anonymous and playfully omniscient narrator slips into free-indirect discourse or quoted monologue to undercut the seeming impenetrability, these narrative devices are features of the narrator's own creativity and eccentricity. And as eccentricity of the narrative and creative characters is normalized in *Hard Times*, free indirect discourse and quoted monologue quickly become commonplace in this novel, almost unnoticeable as the story unfolds. The narrator uses quoted monologue to assert his power of access into Gradgrind's mind, undercutting Gradgrind's perception of his own impenetrability and foreshadowing his future

discovery of the importance of “Fancy,” by providing readers with the “terms” of how Gradgrind “mentally introduce[s] himself”:

Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of fact and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over. [. . .] “You might hope some other nonsensical belief into the head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind (all suppositions, non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind—no, sir! (*HT* 10)

And using “conventional” psycho-narration, with tagging and quotation marks, to enter and comment on the interiority of James Harthouse, a character whose natural and unsuppressed wonderment indicates normalcy, the anonymous narrator describes Harthouse’s active cogitations, reminiscent of Mr. Dick’s “revolv[ing]” hands (*DC* 659): “‘So much the more is the whelp the only creature [Louisa] has ever cared for,’ thought Mr. James Harthouse, turning it over and over. ‘So much the more. So much the more’” (*HT* 131).

Just as the narrator uses his own eccentricity to define the two types of the novel’s eccentricity—normalized creative sanity and “eccentricized” insane conventionality—the narrator’s own consciousness becomes his platform for social commentary. Thus, eccentricity as exterior existence and action, in that eccentricity is something one is as well as something one does, translates to interior eccentricity, requiring the same double sense of being and doing: “It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, [fanciful] things shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn grey and cold” (*HT* 288). In the conclusion of *Hard Times*, the narrator calls for a conscious act of creation within, as well as without.

Memory as an Action of Eccentric Consciousness

Jeremy Tambling's Introduction to *David Copperfield* asserts that "memory is not necessarily of the past, but is indistinguishable from the imagination" (xv). This assertion is appropriate in light of both David and Esther as narrators who must find a way to represent their pasts, whether by attempted accuracy or decided manipulation. Also, this assertion informs the mental workings of the eccentrics, who by comparison to fully-conscious narrators with fully-represented interiors, represent memories that are faulty and unconventional. For Miss Flite and Krook, short-term memory is virtually non-existent, as they exhibit forgetfulness during conversations and fail to process statements made by others and themselves, requiring them to repeat themselves, and thus retread overly-trodden material. Whereas Mr. Dick's bad memories are suppressed and allegorized as "King Charles the First," and whereas his "Memorial" of his own history never fully materializes (*DC* 215), *Bleak House*'s mad artists are able to represent their long-term memories of events. Krook, in particular, exemplifies this aptitude for representing memory. "Coming slowly out of his abstraction," Krook relates the fateful story of Tom Jarndyce's death as a result of proximity to "Judgment," describing Tom's likening of a connection to Chancery with a series of metaphors, one of which is a "mill" at which people are "ground to bits" (*BH* 52). Krook's dramatic end to his recollection details the "shot" heard "echoing and rattling" that signals Tom Jarndyce's suicide (*BH* 52). It is important to note that just as David and Esther do not sever memory from imagination, the mad artist eccentrics show the same creative relationship to their pasts, indicating that mad artistry does not end with language and movement. This passage further shows that Krook, as one of the mad artists, functions as a repository for Esther's own anxiety about entities over which she has no control. Esther's own commentary on Krook's story proves her anxiety: "Nor could I wonder, judging

even from my emotions, and I was no party in the suit, that [. . .] it was a shock to come into the inheritance of a protracted misery, attended in the minds of many people with such dreadful recollections” (*BH* 52).

Eccentrics’ Conscious Self-aggrandizement

Whether represented as interiority or exteriority, eccentrics’ intensification of situations attests to their artistic aptitudes, as it is the nature of an artist to see the world differently and react to ordinary situations with an incongruous sense of extraordinariness. Just as Betsey Trotwood exaggerates David’s vagabond despondency, “having firmly persuaded herself that [David] [is] actually starving” (*DC* 206), and just as Miss Flite aggrandizes her perception of her thoughts’ size and number, Miss Flite heightens her sense of a situation’s importance, by behaving “with an air of great ceremony” (*BH* 34). Similarly, Skimpole assumes that others take much greater pleasure in “assisting [him] in [his] little perplexities” than they actually do, and calls himself “a benefactor” (*BH* 67). In *Hard Times*, Josiah Bounderby reacts to situations with hyperbolic severity: “Let the girl understand the fact. Let her take it from me, if you like, who have been run away from myself. Here, what’s your name! Your father has absconded—deserted you—and you mustn’t expect to see him again as long as you live” (*HT* 42). Gradgrind shows moderation in comparison, by assuaging Bounderby’s excess: “It is of no moment [. . .] whether this person is to be expected back at any time, or the contrary. He is gone away, and there is no present expectation of his return. That, I believe, is agreed on all hands” (*HT* 42). Gradgrind does demonstrate, however, his eccentric need to feel more important than he actually is, when reacting to Bitzer’s “br[inging] himself up against Mr. Gradgrind’s waistcoat, and rebound[ing] into the road” after “c[oming] round the corner with such blind speed and so little anticipating a stoppage on the pavement” (*HT* 31). Admonishing Bitzer, Gradgrind exclaims, “How dare you

dash against – everybody – in this manner?” and expands his singularity into an all-inclusive plurality (*HT* 31).

Esther's Aggrandizement of John Jarndyce and His Mad Artistry

As peripheral characters within *Bleak House* and as central mad artists between those in *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*, Miss Flite, Krook, Turveydrop and Skimpole are all distinctively flat and remain ambiguously exterior representations, in order that Esther may better fulfill her narrative agendas of expression of frustration and re-inscription and aggrandizement of self, which would not be possible through fully interior characters. However, John Jarndyce, a secondary character figuring more prominently in Esther's life and narrative than her eccentrics do, exhibits attributes of mad artistry usually reserved for characters in the periphery. Jarndyce's eccentric attributes and prominence show Esther's own eccentric need to exaggerate his importance.

In possession of a mad artist's aptitude for representation, Jarndyce relegates contemplation and brooding to the “Growlery,” and his claims of “conscious[ness] of an uncomfortable sensation now and then when the wind is blowing in the east” signal his annoyance with difficult people and situations (*BH* 87, 61). Additionally, Jarndyce engages in linguistic manipulation and kinesthetic exaggeration. Upon hearing of the deplorable situation of the Jellybys, Jarndyce responds with an agitated disregard for clarity: “I dare say it is [easterly], Rick. I believe it is. And so the little Jell – I had my doubts about 'em – are in a – Oh, Lord, yes, it's easterly” (*BH* 61). Esther, always keen on noticing syntactical deviation from conventionality, describes his actions as similarly erratic: “He had taken two or three undecided turns up and down while uttering these broken sentences, retaining the poker in one hand and

rubbing his hair with the other, with a good-natured vexation, at once so whimsical and loveable” (*BH* 61).

Because of his prominence in Esther’s narration, Jarndyce’s eccentricity positions him not only between that of *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*, but also, like Mr. Sleary’s “muddled” existence, between insanity and normalcy. This subtle eccentricity exacerbates his erratic presence in Esther’s life by presenting himself as a source of stability and instability as he oscillates between providing Esther with a surrogate family of which he is the paternal head, and offering himself as a husband. For Esther, Jarndyce’s subtle eccentricity means he is the most formidable eccentric, a “superior being,” whose consciousness, prominence, authority and erraticism she must love and accept, but also tolerate (*BH* 769). By the end of the novel, Jarndyce blends his prominence with his characteristics of mad artistry—interiority that is relegated to ‘the “Growlery”’ (*BH* 87) and his oscillating father-lover status—and completes his function in Esther life by orchestrating the Woodcourt-Esther reunion. This mad artist eccentric, as the source of authority, love and pain, is ultimately the source of happiness with his creation of a second Bleak House. A “rustic cottage of doll’s rooms” representing the original and its provision of escape (*BH* 751), this second Bleak House allows Esther to re-inscribe her existence just as projected herself onto her original “Dolly” (*BH* 17). Jarndyce’s greatest act as mad artist is his creation of the “great reward” (*BH* 753) of bestowing Woodcourt upon Esther and Esther upon Woodcourt—a reunion out of which Esther maternally re-inscribes herself with “two little daughters” (*BH* 767).

¹ “Psycho-narration consists of the narrator’s discourse about a character’s consciousness” (Keen 60). This technique usually consists of tagging, such as “she thought” (61).

² According to Keen, “free indirect discourse [. . .] omits tagging,” and presents characters’ “mental discourse in the guise of the narrator’s discourse” (60-1).

³ Keen defines “quoted monologue,” as a “present[ation] [of] the character’s mental discourse (with or without quotation marks and tagging) by shifting from the past tense of narration to present tense and from the third person of narration to the first person of thoughts” (Keen 61).

⁴ See note 1.

CHAPTER 7

CHARACTER FUNCTION

The Moral Imperative of Eccentricity

Julia Saville's article "Eccentricity as Englishness in *David Copperfield*" addresses the presence and nature of eccentricity in *David Copperfield*, as well its purpose. Citing John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, which associates eccentricity with English national identity, individual "mental vigour" and "moral courage" (Mill 124), Saville asserts that Dickens is "unusually attentive" to how eccentricity as indicative of individualism aids "expanding middle classes [in their] need to reconcile upward mobility and the drive toward personal betterment with the obligation to maintain the equilibrium of the family unit" (783). Saville further asserts that "*David Copperfield* [. . .] illustrates Dickens's use of eccentricity to reconcile individualism with communal responsibility" (784). *Sketches by Boz* and *The Pickwick Papers* show that Dickensian eccentricity [. . .] link[s] individual difference to common welfare in the later novels" (Saville 783). Similarly, Tambling's Introduction to *David Copperfield* states that characters serve David's "bourgeois values" by "work[ing] for his good, and find[ing] their own homogeneity—their own marks of difference—swallowed up by their allegiance to his interests" (xvii). With this paradoxical conformity to eccentricity, *David Copperfield's* eccentrics fulfill the double meanings of the noun "character." Eccentricity as a matter of action, existence and possession means that to be a character, by exhibiting eccentricity, is also to have character, by exhibiting moral fortitude.

In her article, Saville discusses the roles Aunt Betsey Trotwood, Mr. Dick and Wilkins Micawber play in “overtly [. . .] shaping David as a man of character” (786-7). As a function of her formidableness, transforming in David’s maturing perspective into stable and loyal rigidity, Aunt Betsey’s “eccentricity persistently works to support a domestic order that rewards middle-class enterprise” (791). Her seemingly inappropriate reactions to situations, which are part of her eccentricity, most often translate into swift and decided action that ensures David’s comfort and aids his development. Also, that parenthetical consciousness, so indicative of Betsey’s moral order, functions, in David’s mind, as displacement of his own inner thoughts onto someone like Aunt Betsey whose inappropriateness he has come to expect. “Like Aunt Betsey’s,” Saville explains, “Mr. Dick’s eccentricity is a mask that he consciously dons to protect himself from the injustice of the world as he works to remedy that injustice” and “madness” when they reach an “intolerable level” (788). Charmingly childish, unlike his *Bleak House* counterpart Skimpole whose childish guise is the cause for others’ suffering, Mr. Dick is a moral success because of his childishness. Mr. Dick exemplifies his charming childishness with his “ability to dispense with [. . .] ceremony and propriety, [. . .] and get directly to the point,” the point being that it is necessary to focus on David’s “creature comforts” (Saville 789): “I should wash him!,” “put him to bed!,” and “have him measured for a suit of clothes directly” (*DC* 204, 209, 222). Micawber, in terms of Dickens’s moral imperative for eccentricity, shows himself to be an eccentric hero as man of letters, albeit, necessarily unsuccessful in order to be a foil to David’s success. “Through Micawber,” Saville observes, “David is forced to learn lessons he might otherwise have managed to evade” (790). But Micawber’s status as an eccentric hero as man of letters is all the more consummate near the end of *David Copperfield*, when his letters, the physical evidence of his

creativity and unconventional methods of written expression, are of use in revealing Uriah Heep as the scoundrel that he is.

These eccentrics' fulfillment of the "character" pun of eccentricity, both having character and existing as characters, shows that eccentricity in *David Copperfield* is the means by which wrong is made right. Whereas *David Copperfield's* eccentrics fulfill both meanings of "character," David himself, as the overruling source of information, fosters a different relationship with eccentricity and morality. Saville observes that David, as an "inventor of character" rather than an actual character, is "training himself to be a man of character" (784). In contrast to the eccentrics he creates, David exhibits "psychological normalcy" in order to maintain "gentlemanly blandness" (787). Thus, his character can be defined as the "happy medium [of] extremes" (DC 376).

Saville's argument is appropriate for considering morality and eccentricity in *Bleak House*. *Bleak House* explores the moral failure of eccentricity, notably with Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle, whose moral outreach has gone awry and turns into solipsistic validation of their own existences. Turveydrop's and Skimpole's excessive "art for art's sake" excuse for duty-shirking also shows the moral failure of eccentricity in *Bleak House*, but demonstrates how Dickens explores a new imperative for eccentricity—that eccentricity enable Esther's survival. Saville fears that eccentric "ingenuity [. . .] creativity and initiative [. . .] threatens to disappear into the "rote learning in the cruel schools of hard fact" in *David Copperfield*, as well as into the "endless legal obfuscation [of both] *Bleak House* and *David Copperfield*" (789). But just as eccentricity in *David Copperfield* is the means by which the characters escape legal, educational and social ills, eccentricity in *Bleak House* is the means by which characters can resist horrible circumstances. *Bleak House's* characters face more formidable forces than the social and familial

forces David faces. Chancery has the power to deal death and destruction. Thus, the survival imperative of eccentricity commands that “ingenuity” and “creativity” not “disappear” but be sharpened and used (Saville 789). The philanthropic eccentricity of Jellyby and Pardiggle fails in this department, of course, and contributes to the novel’s problems. And the duty-shirking eccentricity of Turveydrop and Skimpole represents these two characters’ severed contact with all systems, Chancery included. These two characters are incapable of making the choice either to resist or submit to the system. But like Jellyby and Pardiggle, who provide no solution to what is central in *Bleak House*, Turveydrop and Skimpole are part of the problem, and function as its indirect accomplices. Because they secure parasitic ease and comfort, it is apparent that their madness (preoccupation with diversion) and creativity (representation and rhetorical persuasion), as they combine to form their eccentricity, are the means for survival (or subsistence on others’ labors, rather) after all.

Despite Turveydrop’s and Skimpole’s achievement in surviving by engaging in eccentricity, it is the mad artists Flite and Krook who most successfully employ eccentricity and creativity in *Bleak House* to resist Chancery and ensure their survival. As I’ve pointed out, Esther’s narration, in which mad artistry appears most consistently, shows that Esther characterizes eccentricity as a means of expressing frustration and projecting her pathologies into the “madhouse” repositories (Eberle 41). Thus, Esther, the “hero[ine]” of her tale (*DC* 13), is successfully sane whereas her “mad artist” characters are not, as she creates them for just that purpose. Even though Miss Flite and Krook internalize the system, they can externalize the system in order to resist it. This resistance is an act of Esther’s representations of her own consciousness and the eccentrics’ consciousnesses. Miss Flite’s resistance to “the system” is seen through her dedication to tracking its progression, when there is any. Clearly, dedication does not

equal admiration, as Miss Flite's attention in court is really a function of her desire to see an end to the system's causation of "Madness," to see it forced, by someone with "Cunning" such as Krook, to relinquish its hold on human lives and pay for its destruction (*BH* 758). From Esther's perspective, Krook both accepts and rejects the system by imitating and representing it symbolically and poetically, and by indulging in a fascination with its disastrous effects. While Krook's fulfillment of Miss Flite's allegorical representation of his "Cunning" is not instrumental in dissolving Jarndyce and Jarndyce, it is Krook's ownership of Chancery-related items to be "bought" and not "sold" that hints at the importance of peripheral mad artistry in *Bleak House*. Krook's identification with the system, and representation of it, ultimately lead to his fateful wielding of power over it. This power is apparent in his discovery of the bundle of letters (even though the bundle's meaning is unknown to him), his agreement to hand them over only at the "appointed time," and his ensuing (almost conscious and willful) act of "spontaneous combustion" into "Ashes" as a fatal means of defiant escape, mimicking both the suicide of Tom Jarndyce and the figurative spontaneous combustion of Jarndyce and Jarndyce (*BH* 403, 758). All these factors combined demonstrate Krook's ultimate rejection of the system that he internalizes and temporarily succumbs to. As with the *David Copperfield's* eccentricity which is the source of righting the wrong, the refusal of Miss Flite and Krook to accept the terms of the system provides eccentricity's moral lesson in *Bleak House*.

Eccentricity is an imperative in *Hard Times*, though naturally not in the same way as in *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*. Just as Saville fears eccentricity's disappearance into the legal and education ills of *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*, she fears eccentricity's disappearance into the "rote learning" of *Hard Times*, as well as into the synecdochical "dehumanization of workers into factory 'hands'" (Saville 789). But *Hard Times*, like the other

two novels, shows that eccentricity (or rather, creativity), however faint or suppressed or weak, can be the means of resisting regimented systems of industry and education and the means of giving depth to Gradgrind's flatness. *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* argue that eccentricity can be the means by which wrong is identified and called to justice. Conversely, *Hard Times*'s narrator's novelistic absorption of eccentricity moralizes eccentricity through the fusion of *Bleak House*'s double narrative into conventional singularity, the adoption of linguistic playfulness and the wisdom of omniscience, and the splitting of eccentricity into two forms—that of sanity and that of insanity, wherein the moral lesson of eccentricity lies. As I've shown, the linguistic manipulation exhibited by the narrative voice emphasizes the linguistic eccentricity of characters such as Gradgrind and Bounderby, whose unconventionality is a result of their desire to suppress the "Fancy" of others as well as their own. Gradgrind's and Bounderby's self-suppression of "Fancy" and their dissemination of the doctrine of "Fact" to others force "melancholy madness" from the center to the periphery. The misconduct of those who "resort to low haunts" becomes a form of rebellion (*HT* 27-9). In contrast, the creative eccentrics avoid the madness and delinquency resulting from suppression that others experience.

Like Sissy and her fellow circus folk who make a living by asserting that people need "Fancy" and who therefore are psychologically sound, *Hard Times*'s narrator is sanely eccentric. His sanity is possible because he doesn't suppress his own creativity and because he must show the pathologies of others, such as Gradgrind and Bounderby who create in themselves insanity and eccentricity because of their "Davidian" and "Estherian" self-denial, stringency and blandness. Whereas Esther and David possess rational voices made possible by the transference of eccentricity onto minor characters, *Hard Times*'s narrator, as the "normalizer" of eccentricity, provides the voice of reason, because he knows that suppression is destructive and that "Fancy"

is the only means by which individuals can escape destruction and be happy. Here, it is apparent that the punning of “character” that is so crucial to David’s (and Esther’s) development—having and creating character, and in a way, being a character—is fully realized in *Hard Times*. In *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* David and Esther have character because their blandness opposes the eccentric characters they create, but *Hard Times*’s narrator has character because he *is* eccentric; he holds the individuals he characterizes to the standards he himself meets. Thus, eccentricity evolves from a moral imperative to an imperative of survival to an imperative of happiness.

The Necessity of Eccentricity to Plot

David Copperfield, *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* present many uses for eccentricity: as narrative style and principle, as a category for characters, as a characteristic of peripheral action, as evidence of self-suppression, as a means of escape and as a means of dissolving the seeming foci of plot. Despite eccentricity’s differences in function, centrality and prominence, the novels share a common endeavor. Eccentricity must be what these novels are really *about*. As Saville shows, *David Copperfield*’s story about the title character is impossible without eccentricity. The eccentrics are the true agents of David’s development. The necessity of eccentricity in *Bleak House* is of course less readily detectable. Newsome, who points out J. Hillis Miller’s observation that *Bleak House* presents “a great number of minor characters [. . .] who have no obvious relation to the major stories” (Newsome 40), also argues that “*Bleak House* is about ‘causes’ and ‘relations’” (Newsome 44). When added together, these ideas point to the indispensability of *Bleak House*’s minor characters, for what *Bleak House* is about is the vilifying and dissolving of the center by the periphery wherein eccentricity lies.¹ As *Bleak House* begins in a state of unraveled circumstances because of Esther’s lack of identity, social turmoil,

and an unfinished legal case, it is eccentricity (although it seems it would contribute to the unraveling) that suggests possible solutions.

Initially, Esther's identity needed reassignment in characterization. But Krook's connection to the information about Esther's parentage and its eventual disclosure are the sources of Esther's final claims to familial identity. Additionally, Krook's peripheral possession of the fateful letters and "Will" through his artistic representation of Chancery, his death and bequeathing of possessions to the Smallweeds who are surviving relatives, result in Grandfather Smallweed's gradual centralizing of the Will. It passes to Mr. Bucket who "transfer[s]" it to Jarndyce and to the court, and thus *should* have a small part in "set[ting] things right" as Esther "sanguine[ly] hopes" (*BH* 738, 758, 749). Dickens emphasizes, however, that Jarndyce and Jarndyce is absorbed in costs and that it is not affected officially or legally by the Will. Dickens also emphasizes Esther's "sanguine hopes" and chronological juxtaposing of the Will's emergence with Jarndyce and Jarndyce's dissolution, in order to dramatize the possibility and the failure of peripheral eccentrics' dissolution of the centrally pervasive and long-standing case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. As the ensuing restoration of order is presented in Esther's narration, it is significant that the Will's failure to "set things right" after it emerges from the periphery ultimately serves as a "blessing[s]" (*BH* 758, 760). It dismantles Esther's hopes for Jarndyce and Jarndyce and puts an end to Richard's belief that any good can come from the suit, though the shock of the Will's failure proves fatal to him. John Jarndyce, whose status as a mad artist is dubious, figures as a prominently peripheral character, and has a similar effect on what is central in *Bleak House*. His creative orchestrations dismantle Esther's central pain and restore domestic order in the peripheral "little" Bleak House.

What results from *Bleak House*'s mad artist eccentrics, even though Krook's possession of the Will is not instrumental in dissolving the central case and even though Jarndyce cannot claim full status as an eccentric, is a foreshadowing of the future of Dickensian eccentricity. *Bleak House*'s mad artistry provides the specific lenses through which readers may look to the necessity of eccentricity in *Hard Times*. In the last of the three novels under my consideration, creatively sane eccentricity in the periphery serves as the narrator's means for disparaging the regimented and insane eccentricity in the center, and shows that domestic success is possible through unsuppressed creativity only.

¹ Woloch's discussion of the eccentrics' potential, but unsuccessful, power to "wrest attention away from any privileged, central figure" works with this reading of *Bleak House* eccentricity, which not only takes frequent but temporary attention away from self-effacing Esther, but also affects other central forces in the novel (Woloch 143).

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

The fact that Esther's mad artist eccentrics are the indirect causes of the restoration of order calls for a focus on mad artistry in the consideration of the *Bleak House*'s eccentricity, to the exclusion of other eccentrics. A small part of what Norman Page calls Dickens's "startlingly original" work of "experiment[ation]," Esther's presentation of mad artists as revision of David's characterization and the foreshadowing of *Hard Times*'s split eccentricity shows Dickens's sketches of "modern[ity]" (17). The eccentricity of Miss Flite, Mr. Krook, Mr. Turveydrop and Mr. Skimpole represents the modern plights of abstraction, fragmentation and crises of identity—plights that Esther grapples with from the beginning of her narrative. Esther's "multiple and divided selves," as indirect ways of attempting to define herself, are questionable solutions for her crises, because of the division; she still needs a single and set identity (Newsome 92).

Despite eccentrics' individual representations of incompleteness, the collective eccentricity of these four characters, who are separately difficult to handle, adds up to one half of the existence that Esther would choose for herself. For Esther, the majority of her interiority, indicative of complexity and her own eccentricity, as part of her narrative, is not expressed materially, vocally or kinesthetically. Esther appears to be "bland" composure and moderation incarnate. The opposite is true, of course, for the eccentrics. Manifesting excess and agitation, even hysteria, the eccentrics belie their exceptional behavior with the interior simplicity that Esther shows them to have; they lend themselves to formulaic analysis. Whether or not they

really think with depth and complexity is a mystery. Still, Esther synthesizes these personality contradictions that represent what she is and what she wants to be. But characterizing these traits rather than exhibiting them herself is Esther's only option, as she is a dutiful and "good" Dickensian Victorian woman representing her consciousness alongside that of an anonymous and "patriarchal" narrator (Budd 217). Only through "curious" narration of her own life, a more subtle means of self-expression through the evocation of others—Flite, Krook, Skimpole and Turveydrop, and even John Jarndyce—can Esther choose the best of both extremes. In temporarily relinquishing her moderation and composure, while maintaining her inward complexity, Esther leads a vicarious life of eccentricity. Also, she represents through Skimpole and Turveydrop her resistance to the "Duty" of middle-class occupation, but creates for herself, with the aid of Jarndyce, domestic happiness in which "Duty" would still play a role (*BH* 27). Ultimately, Esther's consciousness and agency, despite the "absor[ption]" of her voice by the "patriarchal agenda" (Budd 217), and her unspoken relinquishment of self-effacement and insistence on self re-inscription, allow her to claim the influential eccentricity as her own, such that readers "'forget' [eccentrics]" (Woloch 38). "Otherwise," in her own mind and in the minds of readers, "[her] 'main' part of the whole novel isn't good enough" (Woloch 38). Esther, through her characterization of the "mad artist" eccentrics' (un)consciousness and agency "beyond" the anonymous narrator's voice, renders the anonymous narrator's and eccentrics' claims of ownership of eccentricity powerless and non-existent.

Esther's consciousness, agency and ownership of eccentricity mean that she aligns herself with the eccentrics' peripheral power to shed light on or affect the central. Pointing out that Esther "cannot see more than a fraction of the whole," W. J. Harvey argues that she "*does* very little in the sense of initiating a chain of actions by a deliberate choice" (969, 965). These

circumstances of Esther's narration and character are conspicuous and speak of her limits as human observer-narrator and of her choice to be outwardly bland, dutiful and passive. But these circumstances make it all the more necessary that she provide the solutions for the problems in Dickens's *Bleak House* world, a necessity to which she nearly admits:

I don't know how it is, I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean to write about myself as little as possible, and I try to think about myself as little as possible. [. . .] I hope any one who may read what I write, will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I have really something to do with them, and can't be kept out. (*BH* 102-3)

Esther—whose narrative is a document within a “document about the interpretation of documents” (Newsome 12), and who is an essentially central figure frequently positioning herself in the periphery of others' stories—aligns herself, by virtue of narrative ownership, with eccentricity as the source of resistance to Chancery and the establishment of her own domestic order. When peripheral eccentrics become central by affecting the central, Esther becomes more relevant and central than she already is, even justifiably so in her own mind, and can “have [. . .] something to do” with the plot without having to disguise her centrality (*BH* 103).

Just as Saville's article is indispensable to establishing the importance of eccentricity not only to *David Copperfield* but also to the other novels, it is also indispensable for establishing, more expansively and “self-reflectively,” the importance of eccentricity to Dickens's authorship as a whole (784). Saville defines Victorian eccentricity (as shown in *David Copperfield*) as an adherence to a “dual imperative” of “individual[ism]” and “conformity that allows characters to function together toward social cohesiveness” (Saville 782). The novels' eccentrics serve this “dual imperative.” Embodying exaggerated unconventionality, they should “resist” formulae and

“labels,” but their simplified exteriors enable formularization, labeling and conformity (Flint xi). Dickens is careful not to over-systematize his body of work, and “individualizes” each novel. The three novels under consideration, however, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, show general consistencies in the characterization of eccentricity, evidencing the “individual” novels’ need for some “degree of conformity” in order to “function together” toward a “cohesiveness” of narration and eccentricity (Saville 782). Each novel individually presents conflicts between and alignment of the interior and exterior spaces, prominence and minorness, centrality and peripherality, eccentricity and normality. But the novels reflect the nature of eccentricity within and collectively present simplicity, thus lending themselves to the same formularized analysis that the eccentrics make possible through their exteriority and simplicity.

The paradox of Dickensian characterization of eccentricity—representing variegation that can be arranged and categorized as I have done with *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*—is suggestive of the roles each novel plays in relation to the others. Individually eccentric and collectively conformist, the novels as a group create a central-peripheral construct. *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times* are peripherally positioned around *Bleak House*’s hybrid centrality. Thus, *Bleak House*’s eccentricity as central to that in *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times* is subject to being dismantled by the eccentricity in the peripheral novels. In Dickensian fashion, *Bleak House*’s eccentricity is exposed as conventional by the moralized and normalized eccentricity of its predecessor and successor.

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In *Bleak House*, Dickens turns a "classical allusion" into a joke — but only because his readers, far more literate than today's readers, would recognize the allusion and therefore appreciate the twist. When we read Dickens (or any nineteenth-century writer), we need to remember this fortunate, productive relationship between the author and the reading public. Present-tense narration is (as noted above) vivid and intense — it is the closest that fiction can get to the intensity of drama, where action is unfolded in the present, as one watches. But for this very reason, relief is needed. In an immensely long work like *Bleak House*, intensity can become fatiguing. With the switch to the lower intensity of past tense comes an equally welcome change of tone. *Bleak House*. Home of John Jarndyce, the novel's elderly hero-benefactor, and his cousins Ada Clare and Richard Carstone, and ward, Summerson, the novel's heroine. Situated in the region of St. Albans, a town some twenty miles north of London, *Bleak House* is portrayed as a refuge, not only from the corruption of the Jarndyce v. Jarndyce lawsuit, but from the corruption of London itself. It is a large old rambling house, as eccentric as its owner. Yet, as its very name suggests, it is not all sweetness and light.