

PATERNITY IN CRISIS: FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONS IN CHARLES DICKENS'S DOMESTIC FICTION

Értekezés a doktori (PhD) fokozat megszerzése érdekében
az **Irodalom- és kultúratudományok** tudományágban

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Készült a Debreceni Egyetem Irodalom- és Kultúratudományok Doktori Iskolája
(Angol és észak-amerikai irodalomtudományi programja) keretében

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Én, Nyári Rudolf, teljes felelősségem tudatában kijelentem, hogy a benyújtott értekezés önálló munka, a szerzői jog nemzetközi normáinak tiszteletben tartásával készült, a benne található irodalmi hivatkozások egyértelműek és teljeseek. Nem állok doktori fokozat visszavonására irányuló eljárás alatt, illetve 5 éven belül nem vontak vissza tőlem odaitélt doktori fokozatot. Jelen értekezést korábban más intézményben nem nyújtottam be és azt nem utasították el.

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Doktori (PhD) értekezés

**Paternity in Crisis: Father-Daughter Relations
in Charles Dickens's Domestic Fiction**

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BTK

2018.

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Magyar nyelvű összefoglaló

A disszertáció célja apa-leánya kettősök, illetve apa-leánya cselekmények vizsgálata Charles Dickens négy regényében, mind e kapcsolatok egyediségét tekintve a vizsgált regényeken belül, mind szélesebb kontextusban, olyan visszatérő mintázatokként tekintve őket, amelyekből következtethetünk Dickens viszonyulására a viktoriánus apasághoz mint diskurzushoz, illetve általánosságban a viktoriánus családfelfogáshoz.

Dickens apa-lány kettőseinek legfeltűnőbb, visszatérő vonása, hogy az apafigura ilyen-olyan okból nem képes pátriárkai feladatának ellátására, és így a leánygyermeknek kell ellensúlyoznia apja inkompetenciáját, emiatt nem ritkán felvéve a metaforikus anya vagy feleség szerepét—de mindez nem azért, hogy megkérdőjelezze vagy eltörölje, hanem hogy megújítsa az otthon patriarchális rendjét. Az elemzések középpontjában az apa és a leány között lezajló interakciók dinamikája áll, amelynek vizsgálatához szükséges a két szereplő szimbolikus szerepeinek és viselkedési mintázatainak értelmezése mind szűkebb otthonukon belül, mind a nyilvános terekben.

A négy részletesen vizsgált Dickens regény a következő: *Ódon ritkaságok boltja* [*The Old Curiosity Shop*] (1841), *Dombey és Fia* [*Dombey and Son*] (1848), *Nehéz idők* [*Hard Times*] (1854), és *Kis Dorrit* [*Little Dorrit*] (1857). E négy mű viszi színre legárnyaltabb módon az általam tipikusnak tekintett dickensi apa-leánya szcenárió aspektusait, és e regények vizsgálata alapján lehetséges legérvényesebb módon jellemezni Dickens sajátos viszonyát az apaság viktoriánus diskurzusához.

A kiválasztott regényeket a disszertáció az apa-lány kapcsolat négy stádiumaként elemzi, amennyiben mindegyikük egy-egy meghatározott konfliktushelyzetet dramatizál e kapcsolaton belül: Paul Dombey és Florence (a lány otthonról történő kitaszítottsága, a leánygyermek szimbolikus, kulturális és pénzbeli értékének metaforizálása), Thomas Gradgrind és Louisa (a fő kérdés az „otthon” működtetésének az alapja: tudományos racionalitás vagy személyes

érzelmei), Nell Trent és a nagyapja (ebben a regényben legeggyértelműbb a szerepcsere az apafigura és a lányfigura között, és az otthoni ökonómia és együttélés lehetőségeit lehetséges otthoni terek bemutatása révén firtatja a szöveg), végül William Dorrit és Amy (a lány pénzübeli és érzelmi kizsákmányolása).

A regényelemzések fő módszertani elvét a szoros, szövegközeli olvasás szolgáltatja (close reading), amely alkalmas a szöveg metaforikus rétegeinek feltárására. A disszertáció elméleti alapjait a kultúratudomány, a gender studies, és a családi viszonyok mintázatait, valamint a pszichoanalitikus dinamikát középpontba állító narratológia határozza meg (főként Janet L. Beizer *Family Plots: Balzac's Narrative Generations* című könyve).

Tárgyszó:

Apa, apai diskurzus, Charles Dickens, domesztikusság, ház, háztartás, Janet L. Beizer, leány, otthonregény, patriarchális berendezkedés, szimbolikus rend, Viktóriánus korszak.

Summary in English

The dissertation investigates Dickensian father-daughter dyads and father-daughter plots both in their particularity in the individual novels and as vehicles suggesting Charles Dickens's attitudes to, and treatment of, Victorian paternity (paternal discourse) and the Victorian politics of the home in general.

The focal point of the investigation has been the relational dynamics of this dyad, especially the various ways in which Dickens stages the daughters' ability to counterbalance the incompetence of their fathers, thereby not infrequently assuming the role of a metaphorical mother or wife as well—not in order to subvert or annihilate, but to renew the paternal domestic order. Therefore, the father's and the daughter's symbolic roles and patterns of behavior have been investigated both within and beyond their immediate domestic sphere, emphasizing the dynamics of interactions between them.

Four novels have been analyzed in detail: *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *Dombey and Son* (1848), *Hard Times* (1854), and *Little Dorrit* (1857). The four novels represent aspects of what I see as the most typical kinds of the father-daughter scenario in Dickens, while they are also explorations of the discourse of the father in Victorian fiction.

The novels are analyzed as four stages of the father-daughter relationship, each one highlighting specific controversial aspects in this relationship: Paul Dombey and Florence (displacement and cultural/financial value of the daughter), Thomas Gradgrind and Louisa (scientific ethos and/or emotions as the basis of the domestic sphere), Nell Trent and her grandfather (inversion of roles and household economy), William Dorrit and Amy (the financial and emotional exploitation of the daughter). In terms of methodology, the dissertation relies on close reading, which has enabled me to explore the metaphorical layers of the texts.

The theoretical underpinnings of the dissertation are the insights of cultural studies and gender studies (including feminist criticism, women's studies, and studies of Victorian

masculinity as well), but the most important theoretical parameters of my investigation of Dickensian father and daughter figures are provided by Janet L. Beizer's *Family Plots: Balzac's Narrative Generations* (1986).

Keywords:

Charles Dickens, daughter, domestic fiction, domesticity, father, house, household, Janet L. Beizer, paternal discourse, patriarchy, symbolic order, Victorian era.

Introduction

Father-Daughter Relations in Context

“There have been at work among us,” a Nonconformist preacher told his people, “three great social agencies: the London City Mission; the novels of Mr. Dickens; the cholera.”

(George Malcolm Young, *Victorian England* 55)

This dissertation has grown out of the simple realization that Charles Dickens’s novels return to the father-daughter relationship with a regularity that verges on the obsessive. Dickens seems to be consciously embedding this special relation in his plots—sometimes more than one in a single novel—even if it turns out to be only marginally important from the perspective of the main plot. In the early *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), for instance, we see a kind of ‘master-slave’ relationship between Walter Bray and his daughter Madeline (567-69). In *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), conversely, Martin Chuzzlewit Senior seems to be a protective father figure beside Mary Graham, his companion (408), in a sharp contrast to Seth Peckniff, the hypocritical father of Charity and Mercy Peckniff (403-16). *David Copperfield* (1850) stages the duo of Mr Wickfield and his self-sacrificing daughter Agnes (307) while in *Bleak House* (1853) the relationship between the protective father figure John Jarndyce and his self-effacing *protégée* Esther Summerson (909-15), complicated by the former falling in love with Esther, is central to the plot. In *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), we find four daughters (Bella Wilfer, Lizzie Hexam, Jenny Wren, and Pleasant Riderhood), virtually all of them appearing in their relationship with their father in a quasi-maternal function (41, 68, 235, 435).

In at least four Dickens novels spanning approximately a decade that is central to his *œuvre*, it is the main plot that hinges on this particular domestic relationship: *Dombey and Son*

(1848), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). To this quartet, we should add the earlier *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), where the paternal role is played by the grandfather. Dickens's obsessive interest in problematic father-daughter relations requires an explanation, and the dissertation is intended as a contribution to this inquiry.

In order to be able to investigate Dickens's controversial father-daughter plots and to appreciate Dickens's unique position in this respect, it is necessary, however briefly, to place his representation of the daughter figure and the father-daughter dyad in a historical and cultural context—which will also enable me to place the present inquiry in the context of the most important critical accounts of this issue in Dickens's fiction.

The first crucial thing to note is that the father-daughter relationship in Dickens has to be seen in the context of a broader ideology of domesticity. “The ideological dominance of the nuclear family in the nineteenth century is what best accounts for its reputation as a middle class institution”¹ —claims Paula Marantz Cohen in *The Daughter's Dilemma* (10). The middle class was the backbone of Victorian society, the layer on which economy, foreign politics, and the legal system mostly rested and from which, in turn, this class drew its strength.² The Victorian middle class could not have fulfilled its social function without a powerful ideology of the domestic sphere. The words ‘domestic’ and/or ‘domesticity’ were increasingly important in Victorian culture, and its contemporary interpretations were inseparable from Victorian understandings of gender roles.

In the center of this domestic ideology stood the middle-class woman, notoriously designated by Coventry Patmore's narrative poem as “the angel in the house”. “Whether

¹ Concerning the middle class, Jeffrey Weeks points out that in the nineteenth century “marriage became in fact what it had always been in theory, indissoluble. The Victorian family was the first family form in history which was both longlasting and intimate” (25).

² See, for instance, Eugene C. Black's *Victorian Culture and Society* (1973), 152-53; H. L. Malchow's *Gentlemen Capitalists* (1991), 15-16, 224-25; or T. A. Jenkins's *Disraeli and Victorian Conservatism* (1996), 136-37.

home offered hope as a place to find religious faith or as a substitute for it, the woman's role was central. To the young she taught faith, to the adult her image remained an example, to the dying she was an angelic guide to heaven, and when dead herself she prepared the heavenly home for those who would follow" (Armstrong, *Dickens* 17).

As M. Jeanne Peterson reminds us, "[t]he angel's stereotypical social role varied, of course, according to her age and status," but the typical activities of the Victorian middle-class woman were the following:

As a young, single woman she carried on the duties of the daughter of the house and was educated to the accomplishments—needlework, a smattering of French, a bit of painting, and piano. She made morning calls with mama and did occasional charitable work. Her single life provided training for her role as angel-wife. As a wife and mother she obeyed her husband, adored him, and promoted his spiritual and physical well-being. She supervised the servants' activities under the watchful eye of her husband and became the devoted and loving mother of a large Victorian family. She was an acquiescent, passive, unintellectual creature, whose life revolved entirely around social engagements, domestic management, and religion. (678)

Peterson suggests that this ideal may never have existed in reality, and we "have been substituting fiction for fact, idealizations for realities, prescriptions for descriptions" (679). The testimony of much Victorian fiction certainly does not bear out the angelic image, since many novels depict anomalous domestic situations full of conflicts.

Examining five representative novels (Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* [1748], Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* [1814], Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* [1847], George Eliot's

The Mill on the Floss [1860], and Henry James's *The Awkward Age* [1899]), Paula Marantz Cohen concludes that, starting with the eighteenth century, an obvious family dynamic can be observed in fiction, which appears as "temporary stability among relationships within a closed system undergoing elaboration and finally giving way to instability, breakdown, and revision" (12), a pattern that also organizes the father-daughter relationships in Dickens's domestic fiction.

Harmonious father-daughter dyads, such as the ones in Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1866), where no domestic problem seems to be strong enough to weaken the tie between the father and his daughters, are rare in Victorian fiction. In this novel, Dr. Gibson acts as an unusually understanding father in his relationship with his amiable daughter (Molly) and problematic stepdaughter (Cynthia). In general, harmonious periods tend to be interludes: either narrative segments that precede conflict and breakdown, circumscribed inauspicious periods of a superficially harmonious father-daughter dyad (such as in Dickens's *The Cricket on the Hearth* [1845] between Caleb Plummer and his blind daughter Bertha, in Dinah Maria Mulock Craik's *Olive* [1850] between Captain Rothesay and his deformed daughter Olive, and in Wilkie Collins's *Hide and Seek* [1854] between Valentine Blyth and his adopted deaf and dumb daughter Mary³), or narrative fragments that follow major conflicts or disasters. In the latter plot type, after periods of adversity, the father and the daughter mutually recognize in each other the unique means of social survival (for instance, in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* between Doctor Alexander Manette and his angelic daughter Lucie, and in George Eliot's *Silas Marner* [1861] between Silas and his devoted daughter Eppie).

It is in this context that the troubled father-daughter relationships in Dickens have to be seen. The pattern suggested by Cohen seems to be relevant to Dickens's fiction, organizing

³ Oddly enough, each daughter in these novels suffers from some hereditary disease, a plot device which at first ensures their father's sympathy.

many of the father-daughter relationships in Dickens's domestic novels. In the novels discussed in this dissertation, women, regardless of their age, are somehow unable to conform to their role of domestic angels. The cause of this failure, however, is usually not their revolt against patriarchal principles, but, paradoxically, the male head of the house, the figure with the authority to define both feminine and masculine roles in domestic ideology: it is the father who prevents women (daughters and wives alike) from fulfilling the domestic roles prescribed to them. The ubiquity of paternal failure or incompetence in Dickens is so striking that the phenomenon cannot be attributed to the individual shortcomings of father characters: the reasons must be sought in more general and systemic malfunctionings.

The inability of Dickensian fathers to perform their patriarchal roles might have to do with the crisis of the institution of paternity and the increasing difficulty of conforming to the expected role. Sarah Stickney Ellis (1799-1872), "the best known ideologue of domesticity" of the Victorian era (Blair 33), founded her prescriptions on the strict gendered separation of social roles. According to Ellis, "[t]o men belongs the potent [...] consideration of worldly aggrandisement [...], all considerations relating to the acquisition of wealth" (51). A man, however, leads a life of constant worry "struggling to exalt himself" (52), but "in moments of trial [...] he has thought of the humble monitress who sat alone, guarding the fireside comforts of his distant home; and the remembrance of her character, clothed in moral beauty, has scattered the clouds before his mental vision" (53). These lofty ideas echo what is formulated earlier as advice for prospective wives/mothers, whose role in the household, according to Ellis, is exhausted in that of a guardian of the hearth, because "[t]he frequently recurring avocations of domestic life admit of no delay" (21-22).

Ellis's view of an ideal(ized) domestic life is based on the tacit acceptance of women's subordination, laying the ideological foundation of the Victorian patriarchal politics of domesticity. "Culturally and politically, the public sphere dominates the domestic, and hence

men dominate women” (Chodorow 10). Such male domination was effectively upheld and extended to every aspect of Victorian society, especially as “men argued that women’s nurturing, domestic, spiritual talents, their mental and physical frailty, and their inability to act successfully in the public spheres of economic life, politics or high culture, should be protected by male political, legal, and social authority” (De Groot 99), that is, by such paternalistic endeavours as were mistakenly supposed to be the key to a strong and authoritative domestic (as well as imperial) superstructure.

In this social environment, women were required to live in a state of anticipatory service toward men for the sake of maintaining the integrity of the household, in which men expected the kind of motherly and/or daughterly attention a patient would be entitled to in a hospital (as in Dickens’s *Martin Chuzzlewit* when the Miss Peckniffs help their father up and tend his wounds following an accident [9-10]), or an invalid in a hospice (as in his *Great Expectations* [1861] when Old Bill Barley, demanding his regular grog as if it were medicine, gives orders to his daughter Clara to serve it [404]). Such a domestic policy in fact means that Victorian women’s life was systematically and strictly regulated and monitored from their birth (as daughters) till their death (as wives, mothers, and grandmothers).

The significance of the daughter figure in fiction underwent important changes, gradually gaining in importance from the eighteenth century, partly as a result of a wider cultural process that was both reflected in and reinforced by the rise of the domestic novel. In this genre, clearly a means of reinforcing the domestic ideology of the rising middle class, the figure of the daughter becomes the focus of attention mainly because she is a liminal creature between childhood and female adulthood, one whose future is at stake, and one who, being in the process of transformation, is available for plotting (rather than the wife whose narratable story is already finished). Thus, the figure of the daughter becomes the hinge of the domestic plot—as well as that of the gothic plot, which is similarly focusing on the liminal

period between girlhood and womanhood—the proper marriage of the daughter becoming a social sign of a virtuous upbringing and family environment.

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa*, and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), for instance, all focus their plot on the daughter. Pamela Andrews, Clarissa Harlowe, Olivia and Sophia Primrose are virtuous and dutiful daughters. All of them are seen and identified mainly through their virtue, that is, the way their virtue is valued by the male characters around them, their fathers and suitors alike. This male prerogative remains mostly unchanged in the nineteenth century; as it is seen in a prenuptial tug of war, for example, between Sir Willoughby Patterne and his betrothed, Clara Middleton, in George Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879).

Thus, the narrative centrality of the daughter figure can be seen as the intersection of a number of—social, cultural, legal—discourses and institutions. This is the point of Hilary M. Schor's *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*, which focuses exclusively on the daughter figure in Dickens, placing the daughter not only in terms of domesticity proper but also in a wider social/cultural context including the English legal system and middle-class society. The importance of Victorian daughters, writes Schor, stems from their position in English law, in which they are “not so much possessors but transmitters, not only of material property, but of ideology, memory, and faith” (4). Schor adds that “[t]he daughter bears a similar role in property law, where (only rarely herself the inheritor of value) she guarantees, by her chastity and virtue, the proper progress of property” (4). This is obvious from the hotly debated Married Women's Property Act, which stipulated that until the daughter “enters the state of marriage (and should she legally depart from it), she maintains a perfect, that is, contractual, individualism: she can move as a free agent, maintaining her own property, the right to her earnings, the right to contract debt, the right to sign her name as a legal person” (5).

After marriage, however, she becomes subject to coverture, losing her rights under it, since under coverture “husband and wife are one person, and that person the husband” (Schor, *Dickens* 5),⁴ which is to say that the daughter, by moving into her husband’s household, was transformed into a non-separate subject entirely under her husband’s legal authority. In this way, she was perhaps even more fully disenfranchised than under her father’s parental supervision. The uneasy relationship between (female) persons and property kept Dickens’s mind throughout his career occupied, most particularly “the attendant problem of becoming too much (and too exclusively) a legal person. Models of rational, possessive individualism which drew him on (of people with purchasing power, the power to plot and possess) also disturbed him, suggesting that people might become—for others and for themselves—only objects” (6), as is the case of Nell Trent in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, or of Louisa Gradgrind in *Hard Times*. The daughter’s figure, however, also represented potentialities for narrative explorations of subjectivity:

[t]he daughter’s powerful alienation before the law (that she exists as a token of her father’s authority, that success in the marriage plot means the daughter’s successful disappearance into the “shadow” of coverture) offered a tool for the fiction, a way of plotting outside a modern, legally determined subjectivity, a way of exploring the other notions of identity the daughter embodied. For in the daughter’s enclosure within, and alienation from, the paternal house, we catch a glimpse of the fictionality of the structures we hold

⁴ Schor also emphasizes that “[t]he laws that governed married women’s property in Victorian England, the laws of coverture, insist that a married woman can bequeath only personal property; any will she writes must have the approval of her husband, and that approval can be revoked at any time up until probate” (*Dickens* 115), thus forcing wives to act under their husbands’ sole legal supervision. For a further discussion of coverture, see Lawrence Stone’s *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (1979), 136–142, and J. H. Baker’s *An Introduction to English Legal History* (1990), 550–557.

most dear: our sense of the family as at once a tribe and a household [...].

(Schor, *Dickens* 6)

On several occasions, Dickens stresses the daughter's alienation as a seemingly irrevocable alteration regarding her legal status in domesticity, which appears either as her specific attribute, that is, she is indeed "a token of her father's authority" as we see in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (70), and in *Hard Times* (171, 198), or as her "disappearance into the 'shadow' of coverture" as in *Dombey and Son* (803), and in *Little Dorrit* (825-26). Thus, "the daughter stands poised between worlds, between houses, unable quite to choose. Her alienation is her fortune; her equipoise is the space of other fictions of subjectivity," therefore, "to take on the daughter's separate story is to re-encounter the nineteenth century story of individuals from a different perspective, for the story of Dickens's career in many ways articulates (forming as much as echoing) the history of the modern subject" (Schor, *Dickens* 6-7).

The present dissertation is both more specific and more general. Although she investigates the novels with typical father-daughter scenario, Schor's book—unlike the present dissertation—focuses entirely on daughters, exploring them also in relation to their mothers and male siblings in novels (*Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Bleak House*, and *Great Expectations*) in which the father-daughter relationship is less important. Also, Schor's inquiry tends to focus on the Dickensian daughter in relation to her (dead) mother, instead of her father.

Victorian women had hardly any choice other than male-controlled subjectivation to become socially accepted members of the household. As Steph Lawler notes, "[t]hrough subjectivation (*assujettissement*), mothers and daughters become [...] (maternal and daughterly) *subjects*. But also, they become *subjected* to the rules and norms engendered by a

set of knowledges about the mother, the daughter, the relationship between the two, and, in particular, the role of the mother in producing the daughter's self" (Lawler 24, italics in the original). Even though, as Nancy Chodorow explains in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, it is initially the mother and the socially prescribed practice of mothering that determines "women's primary location in the domestic sphere and creates a basis for the structural differentiation of domestic and public spheres" (10) the mother is backstaged in much Victorian fiction.⁵ In this sense, Dickens's novels tend to be typical, especially the novels of the present dissertation, staging the father-daughter scenario. In these texts, the mother is either absent from the start or is eliminated very early.⁶

In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the mother is already dead, and the son is dismissed early in the book (he remains in London). In *Dombey and Son*, the mother dies in the first chapter after giving birth to the son, who in turn dies relatively early. In *Hard Times*, the almost invisible mother dies halfway through the novel, while the son is removed: first from the domestic sphere, later from Coketown, and eventually even from England. Finally, in *Little Dorrit*, while the mother dies early in the novel, the son remains a barely visible character, an eccentric always going his own way. In terms of narrative potentiality, the absence of the mother is not necessarily a tragic scenario in Victorian fiction. As Joan Manheimer notes, "the loss of a Good Mother is crippling to the child, but despite their postures of pity, nineteenth-century novels resound with the success of orphans. Jane Eyre, Emma, Dinah Morris, Becky

⁵ Notable examples of the suppression of the mother include Wilkie Collins's *Basil* (1852), Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1875), Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), or Joseph Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* (1895). Beside the emerging conflicts between the pivotal father and daughter figures in these novels, the mothers gradually lose their narrative and social (domestic) significance in the main plot, in this way, conceding literal as well as figurative space to their daughters at home. The complete removal of the mother from the scene—presenting orphaned daughters with their fathers/father-like guardians—can be seen as the logical endpoint of this tendency.

⁶ There are several Dickens novels which emphasize the symbolic position of the son figures, either in relation to the father figures as it is seen in *Oliver Twist* (1838) between Oliver and Mr Brownlow, in *Martin Chuzzlewit* between the young and the old Martin, in *David Copperfield* between David and Edward Murdstone, and in *Great Expectations* between Pip and Joe (and Magwitch); or in relation to the mother figures, as in *Nicholas Nickleby* between Nicholas and Mrs Nickleby, and in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) between Barnaby and his mother Mary.

Sharp—all have the absence of a mother to thank for their social mobility” (Manheimer 533), similarly to Lucie Manette who, due to her absent mother, is able to function as a social tie virtually between all of the characters in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Within this male-imposed domesticity, it was the mother’s prerogative to pass on socially accepted norms of feminine behavior: womanliness, daughterliness, and wifeliness.⁷ Dickensian mothers, however, if indeed not dead early in the novels, rarely conform to the idea of the “Good Mother”. In *Bleak House*, for example, the aristocratic Lady Dedlock fails to publicly acknowledge her daughter Esther, while Mrs Jellyby, posing as philanthropy incarnate in order to facilitate her charity in Africa, (ab)uses her children as slaves. *Great Expectations* is unique in the sense that we have a fairy godmother figure, a mother figure with authority, who is represented as monstrous or at least grossly deluded: she fails to disabuse Pip of his illusions and manufactures Estella entirely as a means of her revenge against men—in this sense, she is the double of Magwitch, who also wishes to “make” a son for himself.

Still, as Nancy Armstrong argues in her *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, the mother’s strictly limited, nevertheless real authority enabled “the rise of the domestic woman” from the beginning of the eighteenth century, giving her “authority over the household, leisure time, courtship procedures, and kinship relations, and under her jurisdiction the most basic qualities of human identities were supposed to develop (3). Armstrong’s book traces this process which had far-reaching consequences concerning feminine and masculine identities and their treatment in domestic fiction, and, as such, is also crucial for an understanding of the father-daughter relationship in Dickens. According to Armstrong, the rise of the domestic woman in the works of eighteenth-century authors like Samuel Richardson, Eliza Haywood, Oliver

⁷ The mother-daughter relationship did not become central until the rise of New Woman writers at the end of the 19th century, many of whom were extremely critical of the mother’s complicity with patriarchal ideologies and institutions, and of the failure of the mothers to enlighten their daughters concerning the facts of sexuality and motherhood (e.g., George Egerton, Sarah Grand, Mona Caird).

Goldsmith, Anna Leticia Barbauld, Elizabeth Inchbald, or Ann Radcliffe, brought the discovery that “the customary way of understanding social experience actually misrepresented human value” (Armstrong, *Desire* 3-4).⁸ The key is the dichotomy of public and private. While, as I have suggested, it is traditionally the public sphere that is constructed as having supremacy, Armstrong’s narrative suggests a reversal of this hierarchy, a reversal in which the rise of domestic fiction was crucial. This reversal is inseparable from the role of the genre in the creation of the modern concept of subjectivity which is predicated on one’s personal features and virtues like compassion rather than social standing. Such an understanding of subjectivity is bound to value the private sphere with its truthful revelation of one’s real features over the public domain where playacting is a necessity. Thus, at least in the universe of domestic fiction, the timeless world of the home gradually became the site of the truth of subjectivity.

While, however, in legal and political terms women were completely disenfranchised, it was, paradoxically, the woman who first came to embody the truth of the modern self. “In place of the intricate status system that had long dominated British thinking, these authors began to represent an individual’s value in terms of his, but more often in terms of *her*, essential qualities of mind.” Thus the modern subject, paradoxically, was born as a woman: initially only women were represented by their emotions, while “[m]en generally retained their political identity in writing that developed the qualities of female subjectivity and made subjectivity a female domain.” Later, partly as a result of the cult of sensibility, novelists increasingly began to represent men in similar terms, as “products of desire and producers of

⁸ See especially the objectified representation of the unusually many female characters in Eliza Haywood’s 1720 novel *Love in Excess* (Alovisa, Amena, Ansellina, Melliora, Melantha, Violetta, Camilla, Ciamara, and Charlotta). In Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, Pamela’s middle-class morality triumphs against Mr B’s social prestige and refinement; in Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the vicar’s daughters, Olivia and Sophia, are idolized by their father as the embodiments of filial dutifulness. In Elizabeth Inchbald’s *A Simple Story* (1791), we see the excluded domestic position of Matilda by her father Lord Elmwood; while Anna Leticia Barbauld’s “The Rights of Woman” (1792) can be seen as a revolutionary manifesto in the name of oppressed (domestic) women—not to mention Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) with the precarious domestic position of the poor orphan, Ellena.

domestic life,” conferring upon them an identity on the ground of “personal qualities that had formerly determined female nature alone” (Armstrong, *Desire* 4).

Armstrong illustrates the transformation of male characters with examples like Heathcliff in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and Rochester in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), but she might as well have referred to the elder Paul Dombey and Thomas Gradgrind from Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* and *Hard Times*, even though in Dickens, due to the specific logic of the father-daughter relationship, the male characters are not necessarily willing to change their ways.

The process described by Armstrong is one reason why it was particularly the figure of the daughter that became the repository or lacmus of the moral capital of the family. The daughter was, partly, a blank on which feminine and daughterly features prescribed by domestic ideology could be inscribed. In her book on the significance of girlhood in Victorian family ideology, Deborah Gorham contrasts the respective significance of the daughter and the mother: “[A] young girl could represent the quintessential angel in the house. Unlike an adult woman, a girl could be perceived as a wholly unambiguous model of feminine dependence, childlike simplicity and sexual purity” (7).⁹ The daughter could unambiguously represent the asexual aspect of domestic ‘angelhood,’ and one kind of malfunctioning appearing, for instance, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is the premature sexualization of the daughter. That is why, claims Paula Marantz Cohen, “the daughter’s role in relation to the father in the nuclear family was a stabilizing one in a spatial frame (it brought the [patriarchal] system into equilibrium).” On the other hand, as has been suggested in connection with the liminal, transitional status of fictional daughterhood, the daughter’s figure was also potentially “destabilizing in a temporal frame (it made structurally problematic the daughter’s entry into other relationships). That is, it made it difficult for her to leave home”

⁹ Gorham also reminds us that “[i]n polite Victorian discourse, the idea that a young girl could have any sexual thoughts at all was simply bypassed. It was part of the Victorian belief system that girls were not only innocent of sensuality, they were ignorant of it [as well]” (54).

(Paula Marantz Cohen 24). Cohen, echoing Schor, declares that “[i]f the daughter is the doomed regulator of a doomed family system, she is also the character most formed to be adaptive as a new context for experience emerges” (34).¹⁰

In general, however, the symbolic and narrative ambiguity lasted only till the daughter’s wedding takes place—that is, transformation from daughter to wife. As Arlene Young writes, “women were seldom seen outside the cage of conventional domesticity and were not readily accepted in roles that seemed to challenge traditional assumptions about feminine identity. To enter the public sphere, to adopt a public persona, would be another kind of radical repudiation—the repudiation of femininity” (*Culture* 122). And even though, financially, the middle-class woman could enjoy a certain independence, this was usually severely limited: “Respectable women who had to make their own way in the world were generally restricted—in both the real and fictional worlds—to careers as governesses, schoolmistresses, or companions” (122).

Dickens and His Domestic Fiction

It is in the context provided above that the question explored in this dissertation can be formulated: why is it Dickens of all Victorian writers who shows such obsessive interest in problematic father-daughter relations? And, even more importantly, to what extent do his representations of this relationship fit in the dominant Victorian domestic ideology? Are his father-daughter scenarios confirmations of the reigning gender politics of domestic ideology or critical and subversive revisions?

¹⁰ Paula Marantz Cohen writes that “[i]n the nineteenth-century domestic novel, it is adaptability, not simple survival that is at issue. This is the role that fall to the heroine, and her context of adaptation is the family. [...] By the end of the century, in Henry James’s novels, we see family systems running down or becoming inoperable and heroines desperately trying to keep them going” (33), as is observable, for instance, in *The Golden Bowl* (1904) through Adam Verver’s only daughter, Maggie.

One possible place where one might seek answers to these questions is the Dickens household, not least because this household, after Dickens's separation from his wife, might be seen as the 'original' of the many motherless households in his fiction. There is little doubt that Dickens adored his own daughters. Michael Slater's *Dickens and Women*, relying heavily on biographical data, explores the author's private life, having us see him as son and brother, husband and lover, and of course, father. In the first part of his book, Slater explains how, through these domestic roles, Dickens was influenced in shaping his own attitude and beliefs towards women (3-217). Slater then moves on to Dickens's fiction, demonstrating how the writer's experience appears in his typical narratives of daughters/wives/mothers (221-97); while in the final section, Slater enlists those sources (mostly journalism and letters) which give us ideas of Dickens's view of women in general (301-72).

Speaking of the special relationship between Dickens and his daughters, Slater remarks that the writer "would sing them [...] irresistable comic songs as he sat in his American rocking-chair of an evening" (179). At the same time, "[h]e was also the best of tender nurses when they were sick," and Catherine "[m]any years later, after her marriage, [...] still found, when laid low by a bad fever, that her father had a unique power to comfort her" (180). This, however, is only one side of the coin.

In his biography, Peter Ackroyd notes that, of the two daughters, it was Mary who "seems to have attached herself to her father with an almost blind affection; certainly, she never married and, of all the children, she was the one closest to him for the rest of his life" (877). "Fond parent though Dickens was, his two girls¹¹ were quite strictly disciplined, like their brothers. They could decorate their attic room at Devonshire Terrace to their own taste but it had to be kept tidy and neat, this neatness applying also to their drawers and cupboards which Dickens regularly inspected" (180), and if the father was not satisfied with his

¹¹ Mary and Catherine, because the third, Dora, died in early childhood.

daughters, he resorted to “[r]emonstrances [...] frequently consigned to notepaper, folded neatly and left by him on their pincushion, which they called ‘pincushion notes’ ” (Storey 77), in order to remind them of the reason for his paternal displeasure.

Paternal love and conservative patriarchal attitudes are by no means incompatible. Hilary M. Schor emphasizes the latter in her account of certain consequences of the separation between Dickens and his wife Catherine as it was seen by their second daughter Kate. She writes that “[t]he daughter [Kate], in recounting what is easily read as paternal violence, casts her own regretful look back at the mother’s house as she proceeds to walk away from it; she seems to be poised between paternal law and maternal absence” (*Dickens* 2), the “paternal law” being the imposed “maternal absence” in the life of the Dickens children following their parents’ separation.

The best place to find answers to the questions above, however, is the writer’s *œuvre*, and it is to Dickens’s novels that I shall turn now. The present dissertation will analyze four novels in detail: *Dombey and Son*, *Hard Times*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Little Dorrit*. The four novels represent aspects of what I see as the most typical kinds of the father-daughter scenario in Dickens, while they are also explorations of the discourse of the father in Victorian fiction.¹² In the Dickensian father-daughter scenario, the daughter’s ‘survival management’ is tantamount to saving herself through taking care of her father, which in practice means that she aims to render continual help to the incompetent or dysfunctioning representative of patriarchal discourse without consciously subverting the discourse itself. This can be readily observed in the historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, which may well be regarded as a kind of epitome of the Dickensian father-daughter representations.

¹² The reason why an entire chapter is dedicated to *Hard Times* but not to *A Tale of Two Cities* is that, while the atypicality of the former novel in Dickens’s *œuvre* (both in terms of its didacticism and in its treatment of the father-daughter relationship) makes it singular within the context of the dissertation, this cannot be stated of the latter work. While the mentally disturbed father in *A Tale of Two Cities*, in almost every respect, resembles Mr Dorrit, the daughter in *A Tale of Two Cities*, compared with her counterpart in *Little Dorrit*, receives significantly less narrative attention; her (con)textual ability is substantially curbed in finding a solution for the specific paternal crisis in the narrative—the daughter and everything having to do with her are pushed into the background.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the more dysfunctional the father, Alexander Manette, becomes (i.e., the more incapable of fulfilling his assigned role) the more his daughter, Lucie, feels bound to offset the father's limitations or deficiencies in order to maintain—at least beyond their domestic sphere—the non-existence of these limitations/deficiencies. In other words, the daughter's intervention in paternal affairs is in direct proportion to the father's sociopsychological non-viability. However, it is not in the interest of the daughter to maintain an oppressive patriarchal family structure; the motivation behind her actions is, in fact, pure filial affection. Oddly enough, the daughter's affection proves to be the main factor in the father's decision to initiate the reorganization of the patriarchal system at the family level, which process results in considerable alterations concerning the relationships within the structure of the Manette family. The novel seems to illustrate the point made by Nancy Armstrong in connection with Freud: The female is endowed “with the power, paradoxically, to empower the male. [...] the male requires the female to complete him” (*Desire* 230). This is precisely what we observe as a series of corrective actions taken by Lucie.

In the novel, the wife who could “empower the male” is absent, since Doctor Manette very early becomes a widower—the sooner Dickens kills off a wife/mother, the sooner a daughter gains priority in the central plot.¹³ However, as Mary Ann Ferguson points out, the daughters “through learning the rituals of human relationships, [...] may replicate the lives of their mothers” (qtd. in Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 228). Whereas these rituals cannot be initiated at home (not in an ordinary domestic sphere), still, they must be internalized by Lucie so that she can fulfill the future role of a wife beside her prospective husband, Charles Darney.

¹³ Such radical shifts of emphasis from mother to daughter are by no means restricted to Dickens's fiction. Charlotte Brontë's Shirley Keeldar in *Shirley* (1849) as well as Elizabeth Gaskell's Margaret Hale in *North and South*, or George Eliot's Eppie Marner (Cass) in *Silas Marner* all undergo the experience of losing their mothers; however, this analeptic turn proves to be that special point of no return in their lives which enables them to rise as heroines from among the more or less significant female characters.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Lucie's primary role or function is, on the one hand, to help her father as best as she is capable either financially or psychologically, while, on the other hand, she has to be unnoticeable, if she can help it, not to push her father to social obscurity. Lucie's social capability aims at substituting her own presence in reality for her father's absence from the same reality. It is a long process which, however, can be seen in the daughter's barely noticeable female substantiality. Lucie Manette is "the golden thread that united him [Doctor Manette] to a Past beyond his misery; and the sound of her voice, the light of her face, the touch of her hand, had a strong beneficial influence with him almost always" (97).

Nonetheless, it is after all Lucie's benevolent angelic presence (rather than her therapeutic words or deeds) which facilitates her father's mental, later on social rehabilitation, despite her frequently obvious 'disappearance' among the other significant characters. Especially in this respect, Lucie Manette may well be regarded as a kind of social/cultural synthesis of earlier, prominent, Dickensian daughter figures (Nell Trent, Florence Dombey, Louisa Gradgrind, Amy Dorrit).

In the scenario which is the focus of this dissertation, the relational dynamics of the father-daughter relationship follows a recognizable pattern. In the novels analyzed here, the fathers are either emotionally unstable figures (Nell Trent's grandfather in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and William Dorrit in *Little Dorrit*), or coldly self-assertive characters (Paul Dombey in *Dombey and Son* and Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times*).¹⁴ Their emotional attitude to their daughters is not unrelated to their success in the public world of money; within the domestic sphere, however, their emotional condition is complemented, fostered, and indicated by the daughter. To offset the father's inefficiency or defects, the daughter is instinctively strong (in

¹⁴ There are, of course, novels in the period with father figures that would be hard to assign to any of the above categories. In Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866), for instance, the father alternates between domestic strength and weakness in his relation to his daughter Lucilla, while, not surprisingly, Lucilla also manifests strong as well as weak attributes in the relationship. *Miss Marjoribanks* is distinguished by its cynical disposition against this patriarchal discourse *per se*.

contrast to their shared epithet, Little Nell and Little Dorrit), while the daughter is at least seemingly weak when the father seems to be strong (like Florence Dombey and Louisa Gradgrind). In these novels, the father's actual and symbolic strength or weakness is always dramatized in and through this relationship with his daughter. This, however, is only one aspect of the father-daughter scenario. Through the father-daughter scenes of these novels, Dickens also explores the viability of the patriarchal discourse itself. In other words, the question to which these novels return with a sense of urgency is whether the actual physical father's weakness or incompetence (e.g., Paul Dombey's inability to love) is more than a personal deficiency and signals larger issues, that is, whether it undermines the discourses and institutions of the symbolic Victorian paternity as well.

In Dickens's fiction, the father represents the state of both the social and the domestic order. In this context, it is important to bear in mind John Carey's remark in *The Violent Effigy* according to which "[n]eatness in household affairs is obligatory for Dickens' heroines," still, "[t]he violent, anarchic side of Dickens [...] despised neatness" (34). Carey's book, which investigates the writer's unusually prolific imagination through his novels, focuses on several topics such as violence, humour, children, and sex, simultaneously referring to the diametrically opposed and opposing nature of (minor) female characters in novels like *Bleak House*, *Dombey and Son*, or *Our Mutual Friend*.¹⁵

It has been mentioned that, in Dickens's fiction, there are only brief periods of domestic harmony. Financial ruin is the plot device which Dickens often adopts to disrupt seemingly neat domesticity. Leeann Hunter states that "[b]ankruptcy [...] figures as a central

¹⁵ According to Alex Woloch, "[m]ore than with any other nineteenth-century novelist, minor characters are at the heart of Dickens's fictional achievement" (126). "They are used to map social relations [...], to externalize different psychological aspects of the protagonist [...], and to present a range of variations within a thematic field [...], compel[ling] intense attention, in-and-of-themselves, through the configuration of their personalities and physiognomy, the texture of their speech, and their immediate and direct interaction with the protagonists" (127). George Orwell even goes so far as to say that "Dickens is obviously a writer whose parts are greater than his wholes. He is all fragments, all details—rotten architecture, but wonderful gargoyles—and never better than when he is building up some character who will later on be forced to act inconsistently" ("Charles Dickens" 454).

epidemic of Victorian economics and as a driving metaphor of the Victorian age, exposing moral weaknesses brewing beneath a society marked by rapid industrial progress, economic growth, and social change” (Hunter 138). Hunter further argues that “Victorian bankruptcy narratives, which frequently feature father-daughter relationships, deploy the rhetoric of ruin in a way that condemns the commercial enterprises of the father and reinforces the value of community engagement through the daughter” (138). In Dickens, the financial disaster serves to bring out a ‘truth’ that has been hidden behind the domestic facade: it is the father’s economic incompetence and irresponsibility that bring ruin to the family, while the daughter turns out to be the representative, within the confined sphere of domesticity, of economic prudence and competence (after all, the word ‘economy’ derives from the Greek *oikonomia* meaning ‘household management’, ‘thrift’) and moral integrity, thus becoming the redemptive agent of household affairs.

This “rhetoric of ruin” is also observable in *Little Dorrit*, where the irresponsibility of William Dorrit, the feeble self-victimized father, results in his financially perverse domestic ethos—both starting and ending in ruin—the most obvious victim of which is his daughter. Hunter points out that “[r]uin is both economic and social in character: the father not only loses his financial resources but also damages his personal credit in the community.” The daughter is invariably affected: during the Victorian era, the ruin of a woman could either stem from a liaison, or from the necessity of working for money. Both are detrimental to her social position and her chance to marry profitably (138-39). Hunter concludes that “[a] daughter’s ruin, in addition to her father’s in a bankruptcy narrative, signals a social barrier to women’s economic mobility in the nineteenth century. Her influence is reined in and the permanence of ruin, both economic and social, becomes doubly evident” (139). Thus, Nell Trent and Amy Dorrit risk and potentially lose their social position when they feel compelled to work for money as a result of the incompetence of their fathers.

In sharp contrast to the emotionally unstable father, the coldly self-assertive father type tries to assert itself through an unemotional approach to family life. Paul Dombey in *Dombey and Son* is the typical *paterfamilias* who, merging public and private lives, does not even attempt to hide his inadequacy as a caring father toward his daughter. Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, at least, tries to pose as a caring father; his efforts, however, are no more successful than Dombey's indifference and revulsion. What connects these different fathers is that they all share a moment of epiphany that relates to their respective daughters. Albeit they all fail in relation to their daughters, it is only through their failures that they can perceive and understand the necessity of their daughter's transforming domestic presence.

Conversely, from the daughter's perspective, it is their victimization that seems to be an inevitable element of these plots. This victimization reaches mythical dimensions, to the point where the daughter becomes what Northrop Frye calls "the figure of a typical or random victim," who may well be called a "*pharmakos* or scapegoat" (41).¹⁶ In this respect, the Dickensian daughter is not far from Iphigenia, someone who is willing to die for the sake of her father, who seems to embody a higher purpose in life, even if this higher purpose (exemplified by Thomas Gradgrind's 'scientific parenting') turns out to be absurd—as it does in these four novels by Dickens.

Thus, the apparently systematic Dickensian elimination of the mothers (and their sons) might be seen to have a twofold role.¹⁷ On the one hand, it is due to the death of the mother that the daughter, propelled into the foreground of the domestic world, becomes a visible

¹⁶ According to Frye, "[t]he *pharmakos* is neither innocent nor guilty. He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes, like the mountaineer whose shout brings down an avalanche. He is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence" (41). The many *pharmakos* figures from both sides of the Atlantic in nineteenth-century fiction, beside Dickensian daughter figures, include Rebecca in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), Grizzly Hypel in John Galt's *The Entail* (1822), or Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* (1891) makes it clear that the *pharmakos* can also be male.

¹⁷ But, of course, there are other Dickensian examples as well, when the daughter has no choice but to act as a central domestic figure. See, for instance, the relationship between the old Martin Chuzzlewit and Mary in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, or the abusive relationship between Old Bill Barley and his daughter Clara in *Great Expectations*.

female alternative to the father, a capable, symbolic mother/wife surrogate, who can assert her female presence even beyond the narrow confines of domesticity. According to Manheimer, “[t]he conjunction of motherlessness and power so frequently enjoyed by the novel’s heroine implies an experience familiar to contemporary women—that the life of the mother necessarily impinges on the life of the child. Dickens [...] understood this perfectly and gave voice to it” (533), paving the way for daughters to help their fathers fulfill their role in the symbolic order and, at the same time, to create a harmonious domesticity.

On the other hand, the mother’s removal is also a strategy to set the stage for the ritual victimization of the daughter, a ritual sacrifice on the altar of the idea of paternity. However, Dickens also stages the opposite scenario, namely in *David Copperfield*, where the child-wife, Dora Spenlow, is relegated to barely more than a helpless daughter figure to David, the self-appointed helpful father figure; or, as Gareth Cordery notes, “[i]n marrying Dora, he is [...] also marrying a version of his mother since they are both childish, pretty, petulant, and incompetent housekeepers. But if Dora is a kind of Clara Copperfield, then David is another Murdstone, attempting to form his child-wife’s mind as his stepfather had his mother’s” (372).

Still, the plot that is predicated on the absence of the mother, the failure of the father, the victimization of the daughter and the father’s acknowledgement of and redemption by the daughter’s sacrifice, eventually results in a new paternal order. Although the new domestic order is modified, the father no longer authoritarian and the daughter no longer victimized, the seamlessness of Victorian domestic ideology is ultimately restored and reinforced after a deep crisis. In Victorian fiction (and society), the daughter can be the key to the solution of paternal crises precisely because she is initially victimized, but it is important to see that Dickens by no means judged Victorian domestic ideology and power position encoding aggression from a feminist viewpoint (Gilbert and Gubar 24-26, 617, 619; Auerbach 82-88, 159-60); rather, his

aim was to arouse sympathy or empathy in his (ready) readership (Andrews 93-94). Put another way, as Frances Armstrong claims, “[m]ale writers, including Dickens, showed themselves aware of the difficulties of the woman’s task in catering to their desires, but considered less often whether home satisfied any of her own needs” (17), just like the fathers towards their daughters in my investigated novels.¹⁸

Michael Slater writes that “Dickens [is] apparently preoccupied with women as the insulted and injured of mid-Victorian England yet voicing no general condemnation of prevailing patriarchal beliefs and attitudes.” In fact, as Slater suggests, Dickens “seems to see the social and sexual trials of his heroines as a sort of tragic nurture which serves to bring them to their full ‘womanly’ (or spiritually superior) potential” (*Dickens and Women* 244), reinforcing the widely accepted patriarchal view—interiorized by generations of women—that the essence of femininity is self-sacrifice. In this respect, the climactic reunion between Louisa Gradgrind and Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times* may well be seen as typical. At the end of a long confessional dialogue, Louisa is seen desperately asking her father for his help:

“All that I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me. Now, father, you have brought me to this. Save me by some other means!” He tightened his hold in time to prevent her sinking on the floor, but she cried out in a terrible voice, “I shall die if you hold me! Let me fall upon the ground!” And he laid her down there, and saw the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet. (171)

This melodramatic scene dramatizes a plausible cause-and-effect relation between an oppressive ideology and its inevitable consequences. Louisa’s appeal to her father(’s house)

¹⁸ “Part of the problem in assessing Dickens’s female characters,” claims Alison Milbank, “lies in deciding what genre of fiction structures them, that is, what kind of work Dickens is writing: popular melodrama, realist novel, moral fairy-tale, political satire or a mixture of modes?” (80).

points out the father's inability to alter the social structure on his own: "Save me," but "I shall die if you hold me!", therefore, "[l]et me fall upon the ground!" (*Hard Times* 171), that is, let the father enable his daughter to move out of the social fabric, so that she may rebuild her life from scratch—but under the auspices of some other ideology.

Louisa's actual fall in front of her father anticipates the collapse of the dystopian patriarchal social system as well as the appearance of a new, altered domestic architecture. This is seen at the end of the book, where, albeit the matrimonial issues of the daughter are not solved (the wife and the husband remain separate), yet, domestic idyll is achieved in the house (in the father-daughter relationship) due to the transformed domestic ideology, in which Louisa finds her own life meaningful at last (234).

The daughter can facilitate and embody the solution for the crisis of paternity because of a crucial Victorian shift in the perception of the father, which Susan Morgan calls the historicization of the father. It is as a result of this change that the father can become "recognize[d] [...] as a matter of culture, rather than of nature, and as having particular, and changing, clusters of attributes" (6). This historical shift in the perception of paternity and of the relationship between the ideology of fatherhood and the actual practice of being a father paved the way for an altered domesticity, as we shall see in the analysis of the concluding chapter of *Dombey and Son*.¹⁹ According to Morgan, "[t]hat sense of history, including the sense that character means character in process, self is self in time, celebrates qualities of connectedness the culture has traditionally undervalued and labeled as feminine." Therefore, "the qualities of mercy and forgiveness consistently appear in these novels as progressive

¹⁹ Susan Morgan also argues that in nineteenth-century British fiction "heroines represented the fictional transformation of religious values into secular values, of Christianity into femininity, of eternity into history, of fixity into change. The novels argue that a sense of history is the precondition for any social or individual progress" (17).

models of human relations” (Susan Morgan 17), which in the works of Dickens are subtly shaped by the daughters.²⁰

The present dissertation aims to investigate Dickensian father-daughter dyads and the father-daughter plots both in their particularity in the individual novels and as vehicles suggesting Dickens’s attitudes to, and treatment of, Victorian paternity (paternal discourse) and the Victorian politics of the home in general. The focal point of my investigation is the relationality of this dyad, especially the various ways in which Dickens stages the daughters’ ability to counterbalance the incompetence of their fathers, thereby assuming not infrequently the role of a metaphorical mother or wife as well, not in order to annihilate, but to renew the paternal domestic order. Therefore, I shall investigate the father’s and the daughter’s symbolic roles and patterns of behavior both within and beyond their immediate domestic sphere, emphasizing the dynamics of interactions between them.

The daughter figures discussed in my dissertation, at least at one climactic point, struggle with the inevitable necessity of choosing between their problematic father and their often not-less-problematic prospective husband. Florence in *Dombey and Son* risks her tenuous domestic position when her attachment to Walter Gay further debases her in her father’s eyes. Louisa in *Hard Times*, albeit married, chooses to go back to her father, regarding him as someone under whose domestic supervision she has still more freedom than under that of Josiah Bounderby. Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and Amy in *Little Dorrit* do not even dare to consider seriously the plausibility of a matrimonial life without their mentally feeble fathers’ future presence in them.

While relying on the insights of cultural studies and gender studies (including feminist criticism, women’s studies, and studies of Victorian masculinity as well), the theoretical

²⁰ “In the work of Scott, Gaskell, or Eliot, [or even Dickens],” notes Susan Morgan, “mercy is not about great power but about great fluidity, an acute sensitivity to one’s own potential for becoming different. The power to influence is intertwined with the recognition of one’s own, culturally feminine, potential for being influenced” (17).

parameters of my investigation of Dickensian daughter figures are defined by Janet L. Beizer's *Family Plots: Balzac's Narrative Generations*. Drawing upon Barthesian narratology, psychoanalytic theory and the insights of feminist criticism, Beizer realizes the deep connection between the ideology of paternity and nineteenth-century narratives. According to her, "[n]ineteenth-century fictions do display the father. But they ultimately undermine his status, his authority, and his power as lawgiver and regulator of family, social and narrative codes. The nineteenth-century text, divided against itself, repeatedly undercuts the proffered images of its own authority" (4). Focusing on nineteenth-century French fiction, especially on Balzac, Beizer claims that, "[s]ince Balzac is an exemplary representative of the traditional novelist, the questions [...] about the father principle in his works will have larger implications for the status of nineteenth-century textual paternity" (4). In my view, Dickens has a comparable—central, even iconic, yet controversial—position in the Victorian discourses of patriarchy,²¹ genealogy, and domesticity.²² Beizer goes on to say that

[t]he sociopolitical structures of the *ancien régime* which laid so heavy a claim to the nostalgia of Balzac and many of his contemporaries were notably patriarchal; father, king, and God exercised an analogous power in their respective (but continuous) domains. What Balzac laments in postrevolutionary society is the fall from hierarchic authority to a decentered (or multicentered) individualism. Because symbolic systems are inevitably culture-bound, this lack of a center is conceptualized as the loss of a father. (4-5)

²¹ On the concept of the word 'patriarch' (and especially 'patriarchy'), see Mary Murray's *The Law of the Father?* (1995), which is "informed by an understanding of patriarchy as involving the economic, political and ideological domination of women by men, which may include but is by no means limited to sexual domination and paternal power. In its paternal form, especially, it is also a form of domination which can be exercised between men" (8).

²² Throughout the analytical chapters, I shall also be referring to other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, attempting to clarify Dickens's position in the fictional representation of father-daughter pairs.

Even though nineteenth-century England was spared the dislocating experience of a revolution, Victorian novelists (notably, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Meredith, and Anthony Trollope) alerted their readers to the existence of the fault-lines in a decentered patriarchy in ways not unlike those of Balzac. Thus, several aspects of Beizer's characterization of Balzac's fiction apply to the Victorian, particularly Dickensian, novel: "The problem of paternity is tightly knotted into the Balzacian text, appearing in varying patterns of heredity, succession, paternal tyranny, orphaned and illegitimate children, filial transgression, and parricide" (Beizer 5).

Following Beizer, in the analytical chapters, I shall be referring to the cultural/metaphoric context of my investigated novels as 'the symbolic order,' using the term in a broadly Lacanian manner, presupposing that "the subject is 'constituted in the symbolic order' " (Shepherdson 11). In my use of the term, I am drawing upon Beizer's reference to Eustace M. Tillyard's claim according to which "[t]he sociopolitical structures of the *ancien régime* [...] were notably patriarchal; father, king, and God exercised an analogous power in their respective (but continuous) domains" (qtd. in Beizer 4). Tillyard speaks about the "great chain of being," according to which the "order in the state duplicates the order in the macrocosm" (88), namely, God's supremacy is fundamentally analogous, among other things, to the supreme political position of a king, as well as to the foremost domestic position and function of a father in a family (87-100). Lacan looks upon the symbolic order as an all-encompassing cultural frame of reference (7, 12, 40, 392)²³ in which "[t]he father represents a function of both power and temperament simultaneously; an imperative that is no longer blind but 'categorical'; and a person who dominates and arbitrates the avid wrenching and jealous

²³ Kareen Ror Malone and Stephen R. Friedlander note that "Lacan borrowed the idea of the Symbolic Order from the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, and modified it to dovetail with Freud's conceptualization of the Oedipus complex. Lacan used the Symbolic Order to connect the division of consciousness with human beings' ambivalent efforts to accept civilization" (12).

ambivalence that were at the core of the child's first relations with its mother and its sibling rival" (Lacan 149).

According to Lacan, "[i]t is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (230, italics in the original). Thus, there are always 'two fathers'—as in Dickens's fiction. The actual father figures, notwithstanding their physical or psychological deficiencies, exist in a symbolic world predicated upon the name of the father, the metaphorical cornerstone of patriarchy, whose effective presence or absence defines the politics of Victorian domesticity—the most tangible Dickensian representation of the symbolic order. As Roland Barthes claims, "all [nineteenth-century] narrative is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) Father—which would explain the solidarity of narrative forms, of family structures" (10). To this, Beizer adds that "[i]t is particularly helpful to recognize that language, narrative, and family structures all oscillate between the poles of order and disorder, or law and desire, and that each pole exerts a pull. This tension is reflected by the ambiguous status of the father [...] generally in nineteenth-century fiction" (8).

Dickens's fiction, in particular, is hardly imaginable without some patriarchal figure, even if the father in question is not self-evidently authoritative (or authoritarian). He clearly subscribes to the dominant Victorian ideology; thus, even though the concrete fathers in his novels prove to be incompetent, paternity as a symbolic principle or discourse remains intact. This conclusion is the most important finding of my research.

No analysis of the father-daughter relationship in Dickens can be undertaken without some understanding of Victorian domesticity, and the subsequent chapters will pay particular attention to domestic spaces, often to draw attention to altered spatial circumstances stemming from changed or changeable father-daughter relations. In her *Dickens and the Concept of Home*, Frances Armstrong reminds us that "Dickens has traditionally been seen as an

uncritical supporter of the concept of home, and indeed as in large part responsible, with Queen Victoria's help, for its creation and endorsement." Frances Armstrong, however, goes on to argue that, even though "Dickens certainly did celebrate the value of home, and increased that value by his assertion of it," still, "in the course of his writing he presented the home as myth, fiction and reality, and he was aware that if home is an answer it is not a place where questioning ends" (1-2). Armstrong's book, through examples from Dickens's fiction and personal life, lays primary stress on the significance of the concept of home in terms of homemaking (47-86), expanding (87-104), exploring the powerful importance of the past home (105-126) as well as the relationality between the home and the surrounding world (127-153). Her approach has been instrumental in working out a supposition that will inform the analyses of the present dissertation: one particularly striking feature of the selected Dickens novels is that in them, literally any place can function as a potential living space, as a place of domesticity.

Each chapter lays stress on the state of domestic life by examining the *milieu* surrounding the father and the daughter. At the same time, the chapters acknowledge a possible metonymic identification of the physical house with the *paterfamilias*. Drawing on the Beizerian theoretical framework outlined before, I argue that no Dickensian domesticity can be sustainable without a capable daughter figure, moreover, the father in Dickens's fiction can embody the notion of the God-king-father socioethical triangle at home to the degree as his daughter enables him—who, oddly enough, never intends to *consciously* subvert the paternal domestic ideology. It is my hypothesis that, in the domestic world of Dickens, the crisis of paternity can only be solved by the redemptive agency of the daughter. The four novels are analyzed as four stages of the father-daughter relationship, each one highlighting specific controversial points in the respective paternal-filial relation: Paul Dombey and Florence (displacement and cultural/financial value of the daughter), Thomas Gradgrind and

Louisa (scientific ethos and/or emotions at home), Nell Trent and her grandfather (inversion of roles and household economy), William Dorrit and Amy (financial and emotional exploitation). In my understanding, Dickens, through these domestic tender spots above, consciously draws attention to both the inadequacy of the father and the absolute necessity of the daughter at home. He centers the daughter consistently by killing off the (incompetent) mother and by moving the son into the background.

Part 1. Coldly Self-Assertive Fathers and Victimized Daughters

Chapter 1. Business House vs. Home: The Patriarch and His Displaced Daughter in *Dombey and Son*

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.

(Authorized Version, Matthew 12:25)

Broadening the implications of the word ‘house,’ Jack Lindsay claims that for Dickens the Victorian (upper) middle-class household, that is, “[t]he House (representing the Family and above all the maternal body) is [...] a refraction of the whole society,” moreover, it often “comes to stand for all that is most enclosing—restrictive, repressive, alienating—in Victorian society” (100).²⁴ These implications of the word ‘house’ are present throughout *Dombey and Son*, the novel in the focus of the present chapter.

The metonymic implications of this word are unfolded very early in the novel. Beside the birth of the son, the other almost simultaneous event is the death of the mother. Thus, if the mother’s body symbolizes the House, as is suggested by the Platonic metaphor of *chora*, then the novel starts with its loss, and what remains instead is the symbolic (paternal) House. Accordingly, in the opening chapter, for Florence Dombey (the daughter), her father is only an ‘idea,’ stuffed clothes; as opposed to this, her mother appears as a face, something which it is possible to approach not only emotionally and conceptually but also physically (*Dombey* 13-14).

²⁴ Restriction, repression, and alienation, however, can only be imposed on the daughter—at least in Victorian fiction—by the father. Relevant examples include the enervated puppet-like daughter Amelia Sedley’s relationship with her father John Sedley in William Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848), the one-sided and psychologically emptied relationship between Augustus and Marie Melmotte in Anthony Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now*, or the relationship between the almost servile daughter Elizabeth-Jane and her father Michael Henchard in Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

What this chapter will primarily investigate is the father-daughter dyad as it is embedded through figurative language in the fabric of the text. I shall also explore the daughter's displacement as represented by her physical places and in her symbolic position both in the circumscribed domestic space (the household proper), and in the surrounding social sphere and the symbolic order *per se*.

My main purpose is to shed light on the way Dickens's novel addresses the oppressive nature of Victorian patriarchal discourse, calling attention to the daughter's being a *metoikos* in the family. The Greek word *metoikos*—which I am using out of context here—is not only an apt designation of the daughter's peripheral, temporary domestic position and status, but also indicates that she is forced to change her place of residence at a climactic point (in Chapter 48), thereby forced to change, beside her domestic environment, her social status as well (*metoikos* literally means “one who has changed his residence” [*Etymology Dictionary* n.p.]). This definition echoes Hilary M. Schor's view, according to which “[a]lienation is the novel's keynote,” which means that “[t]he daughter begins [...] by being *alien* to the paternal order, outside of it,” literally leaving the paternal house disgracefully and angrily to be able to return much later to it as the angel of domesticity (*Dickens* 51, italics in the original).

Florence's place, both in the physical and symbolic sense of the word, is absent from the world of the book, due to the biased, authoritarian, patriarchal family structure in which the mother and the son, having no choice in the matter, try to maintain the *status quo* of the symbolic order. Denis Donoghue points out that the novel starts with a disturbingly hierarchical scene: “*Dombey and Son* begins with father and infant son in the darkened room. The scene is composed around them, as if their force were already institutional and statutory. Mrs. Dombey's presence in the room is almost accidental; she is in a neglected corner of the picture. Florence is not in the picture at all” (384). Rodney Stenning Edgecombe refers to the Florence's position as a “condition of enforced idleness in a decaying house,” that is, “the

kind of life that caste and custom have forced upon Florence” (Edgecombe 81). This metaphorical placelessness becomes physical homelessness when, much later, in a climactic moment, by striking his daughter, Paul Dombey sets Florence adrift. With this act of violence, Dombey “not only has lost his middle-class identity, but has shattered the structure of the middle-class home,” too, the home which has never, in fact, served as a paternal shelter for the daughter. Florence runs out of the house, wandering in the surrounding streets, trying to survive “the moment of abuse [that] can thus be seen as a symbolic breach in the middle-class home itself” (SurrIDGE 60), or the daughter’s metaphoric as well as physical peripherization in the symbolic order. In what follows, I shall investigate how the daughter’s domestic ‘placelessness’ appears and changes through spatial metaphors which allude to her controversial physical, economic, and symbolic presence, suggesting that the narrator’s conscious use of economic and/or theological metaphors illustrates the principal characters’ transformation from physical to symbolic positions.

The House of Paul Dombey, Esq.,—either as a circumscribed domestic sphere or as a prominent business house in the City—is divided almost irreparably from the start. In addition to the overt domestic rift between Dombey and his daughter Florence, there is the unfolding breach of confidence in the business realm between Dombey and James Carker, one of his head clerks, and sole confidant. These two seemingly separate plotlines gain momentum by merging into a single narrative from Chapter 31, and it is as a result of this fusion that Paul Dombey begins to undergo his personal as well as social regeneration. Natalie McKnight argues that, in the early novels, Dickens “blended stereotypical ideals of masculinity and femininity in his characterizations of male protagonists and secondary male characters; but around the mid-point of his career, or just before, Dickens begins to question the ideals more often and more vigorously” (55). According to McKnight, *Dombey and Son* occupies a crucial position in Dickens’s career in this respect, as it was in this novel that his „dismantling of the

masculine ideal” began; starting with this novel, Dickens was taking aim “in particular at the idea that a good Victorian man must be physically strong, hard working and a successful provider for his family” (McKnight 55). Dombey was the first major character through which Dickens “captures the emptiness of the male ideal, and he begins to suggest how the ideal may meet the needs of a growing capitalist economy far more than it meets human needs.” The secondary male characters in the novel, “[t]he Wooden Midshipman crowd—Sol Gills, Walter Gay, Captain Cuttle—suggest a much healthier and happier take on masculinity: one that embraces adventure, romance, tenderness and camaraderie, but not necessarily business success” (56).

Mr Dombey, a prominent London merchant, lives his professional and private life with absolute self-confidence, feeling simultaneously “pride and a mercenary attitude toward [his] human relations.” What is more, “not only is Mr Dombey guilty of both, he views them as virtues” (Reed 169). This is endorsed by his word, as is evident from the words of Mr Morfin, one of the head clerks of the firm, when Dombey goes bankrupt:

“He is a gentleman of high honour and integrity. Any man in his position could, and many a man in his position would, have saved himself, by making terms which would have very slightly, almost insensibly, increased the losses of those who had had dealings with him, and left him a remnant to live upon. But he is resolved on payment to the last farthing of his means. His own words are, that they will clear, or nearly clear, the House, and that no one can lose much. Ah, Miss Harriet, it would do us no harm to remember oftener than we do, that vices are sometimes only virtues carried to excess! His pride shows well in this.” (*Dombey* 753)

It is hardly surprising, then, that Paul Dombey is not willing or able to differentiate between his professional and private existence, his business and domestic relationships. To protect his own domestic and business interests, while at the same time also to conceal his own inadequacy in some of his human relationships (with, for instance, his daughter Florence), he deliberately keeps his relationship with his co-workers impersonal, which seems hardly different from the one with his two wives (Fanny and Edith in chronological order) and of course with his daughter.

Arriving at his offices, “[a] solemn hush prevailed, as Mr Dombey passed through the outer office” (*Dombey* 161); within his business realm, he carefully maintains an elaborate system of self-protective buffer zones: “Between Mr Dombey and the common world, [...] Mr Carker in his own office was the first step; Mr Morfin, in *his* own office, was the second. [...] Mr Carker, as Grand Vizier, inhabited the room that was nearest to the Sultan. Mr Morfin, as an officer of inferior state, inhabited the room that was nearest to the clerks” (162). The hierarchical organization of his business house already anticipates Paul Dombey’s obvious desire to be in touch with as few people as possible in his business and his private life alike. Still, for the sake of financial stability, he does need some people who represent the same strict attitude to business—all in the interest of the future owner of the firm: Little Paul Dombey.

The orientalizing epithets “Grand Vizier” and especially the “Sultan” (162) allude to a twofold absolute power: one in his family (thinking of the tangible aim of a *purdah* either in the sense of a harem or simply a curtain segregating females [wives and daughter] as private properties of a sultan), and another in his public (in our case business) affairs. Oriental allusions keep recurring in the novel, enhancing Paul Dombey’s supremacy in the eyes of all “who are about him [...] to confirm him in his way of thinking” (581). At one point, he is also referred to as the “Bashaw” (or pasha, 399). While the the words “Grand Vizier” and “Sultan”

are used concerning the relationship between Dombey and his direct business subordinates, “Bashaw” is applied to his authoritative domestic relationship with his daughter, Florence.

Mr Dombey’s approach to society (not only in his business life) seems to be expedient if he wishes to embody the “economic man—that is, a model of humanity understood principally as a selfish, profit-seeking agent, motivated only by a desire to increase his own wealth” (Guy 128).²⁵ A metaphor of stairs leading up to the ruler’s throne properly reveals the way he looks upon the relationship with his first wife (“[h]e had kept his distant seat of state on the top of his throne, and she her humble station on its lowest step” [*Dombey* 519]). Dombey’s domestic stipulations endeavor to shape his household *ad libitum*, asserting: “I am not accustomed to ask [...]; I direct” (608), after persuading his social mediator (James Carker) of his “prone[ness] to pervert even facts to his own view, when he is at all opposed, in consequence of the warp in his mind” (582). It is Dombey’s inability to distinguish between home and business, to divide his life, that is the source of the division he is not even aware of: the almost total alienation between him and his daughter, Florence. As George Holoch puts it, “the rigid character of Dombey is a straightforward representation of depersonalization brought about by his total absorption in his public role. Dombey’s devotion to business leads him to envision all human relations according to the pattern of the market, to the extent that everything is considered from the point of view of property and power.” This alienating view of human relations can be maintained as long as Dombey is successful in business, as long as he can buy the cooperation of others: “[i]t is only when he is financially ruined, removed from any significant social role, that it becomes possible for him to establish direct human contacts, unmediated by the cash nexus” (335).

²⁵ Ralph Nickleby, the avaricious father figure of *Nicholas Nickleby*, prefigures Dombey in this respect. He is characterized as an immutable, consequently, objective-oriented social phenomenon: “Stern, unyielding, dogged, and impenetrable, Ralph cared for nothing in life, or beyond it, save the gratifications of two passions: avarice, the first and predominant appetite of his nature, and hatred, the second. [H]e was at little pains to conceal his true character from the world,” furthermore, we find that “[h]e appeared to have a very extraordinary and miscellaneous connexion, and very odd calls he made, some at great rich houses, and some at small poor houses, but all upon one subject: *money*” (532, 534, italics added).

The narrator makes it clear at the very beginning that the plot in Mr Dombey's mind, the master plot that he thinks ought to organize the narrative, is conceived as the Father-Son plot, suggesting the biblical sense of *the* Father and *the* Son in their own timeless domestic sphere as a private universe. From the start, the domestic lower-case 'son' and the business-site upper-case 'Son' emerge in the mythical-biblical figure of the Son. That is why Dombey Junior is referred to from the start—through Mr Dombey's perspective—as 'Son,' without the definite article and with a capital 'S', as if it were a proper name, whereas it is simply the word that will appear beside that of the Father's in the name of the firm. This strategy is also related to the distinction between the body and the mind, the physical and the conceptual, referred to earlier: just as the mother was unimportant as a person and as a physical presence apart from being the container of the coming Son, young Paul's physical reality is ignored by the father apart from the desire to keep him alive as the container of the idea of 'Son.' Dombey's problem with Florence is partly the fact that Florence embodies no idea that could be perceived or appreciated by Mr Dombey, and remains a body, a physical presence – by definition useless and placeless for the father. The symbolic importance of the name (or Name) of the son—or the son as merely a name—is tremendous from Mr Dombey's perspective. As Anthony E. Dyson notes:

Dombey and Son is the most telling of Dickens' titles, in that it reminds us continually of little Paul's status in life and death. As son (small "s") he dies before the novel's real development has started, and is influential mainly as a poison in his father's mind. As Son (capital "S") he remains indissolubly linked with the great firm until its downfall, the Idea for which life and humanity—his mother's and sister's, his own—are spent. But the dichotomy is not simple. As Son, he is not only the focus of all Mr Dombey's ambitions, but

the recipient of whatever love Mr Dombey has it in him to give. As son, he is the flesh and blood boy whose preference for Florence is the posthumous poison in Mr Dombey's soul. (Dyson 123)

Whether the son is dead or alive, his negative (poisonous) influence is constantly felt by his father, especially as long before the birth of little Paul, the symbolic status of the 'Son' as official part of the firm (in the letterhead or the stamped signature) is conferred upon him by Dombey Senior. Dickens attaches a sort of economic sanctity to the naming of the firm as if the partnership were established by using indelible ink in the deed of foundation never meant to be subject to change.²⁶

Dickens makes it clear from the start that this business naming also invokes the biblical Father-Son plot and setup through its capitals. The biblical allusions are important not merely because they are an effective source of irony but also because they add larger stakes to the dominant dichotomy of body and spirit, physical and spiritual/conceptual presence. The narrator's playful perspective and rhetoric that creates the superficial similarity between father and son, as if mocking the theologically substantial identity that governs Mr Dombey, dominates the narrative in the opening sentences. It suggests an immutable present, where the divine claim "I am that I am" can only be used (usurped) by the patriarch and his male offspring (an exclusivity, which nevertheless implies the precarious presence of the daughter even at this early stage of the main plot).²⁷ In this theologically self-referential symbolic order

²⁶ Another example of this peculiar attitude to a company name occurs in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) where the narrator depicts the living business partner's mental approach to his dead partner through the trade name itself: "Scrooge and Marley" (8). However, Dombey's attachment to his dead business partner is significantly stronger, since, understandably, his son for him continually converges with his 'Son' all along the novel.

²⁷ The reason for embedding biblical quotations sporadically within my text was the unusual frequency of scriptural allusions in Dickens. However, I refrained from reading the novels in terms of any denominationally specific theological system, since Dickens himself also refrained from strictly dogmatic, institutionalized Christianity both in his life and in his fiction. The Bible, however, remained a constant frame of reference for him. In this respect, see, for instance, Andrew Sanders, *Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist* (1982), 61-63; Janet Larson, *Dickens and the Broken Scripture* (2008), 10, 42-43; or Gary Colledge, *Dickens, Christianity and The Life of Our Lord* (2009), 6-8.

Dombey represents God the Father (i.e., the Old Testament as the divine Law, the antecedent *biblion*), whereas little Paul, God the Son (i.e., the New Testament as the personified document of the law-abiding nature, the successive *biblion* [from Dombey's viewpoint the novel itself]). The father and the son together comprise the *biblia*, the legitimate, continuous existence of the House (in its mercantile, domiciliary, and literary sense also). And in the same way, as an all-encompassing yet closed universe, the *Biblia* houses the Father and the Son. Dombey and his son are also housed in their socially closed home and business house, the two virtually constituting one and the same metaphysical space (a kind of Möbius strip) in the elder Dombey's mind evoking the etymology of the word 'economics', which "as Ruskin notes, takes its root from *oikos*, the household" (qtd. in Schor, *Dickens* 4). Moreover, the notion of *economics* tends to converge in Dombey's way of thinking with the theological sense of *economy*, which is, from his (as well as his sister's) viewpoint, a positive order of salvation: "There is a providence in everything; everything works for the best" (*Dombey* 389). Mrs Chick's words evoke Paul the apostle's words written in Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The "God" (i.e., the self-appointed god) in the book is Dombey himself, and since Florence is not his *son*, she is not predestined for social salvation, that is, she is not "called [to life, to fulfill a social and economic role] according to his [Dombey's] purpose" (*Authorized Version*, Romans 8:28).

Ironically, in the Greek language, the gender of the word 'biblia' is feminine, a circumstance which might anticipate that "Dombey and Son," [has always been in reality], [...] "indeed a Daughter, [...], after all" [*Dombey* 777-78], especially because without Florence (the 'biblical wisdom'), little Paul Dombey (the 'Son') as the personified creation of Dombey (the 'Father') could hardly survive even as long he does. The complex symbolic

importance of Florence in the novel might be illuminated by what Northrop Frye and Jay Macpherson suggest concerning the Christian metaphors of wisdom:

In the latter part of chapter 8 in *Proverbs*, wisdom, still being personified as a woman, goes back to the beginning of Creation, when she was presumably a child, [...]. Then she goes on to describe the process of Creation, and herself as a part of the process of Creation; because in the Biblical theory, wisdom is an essential part of the creative act. In it, wisdom is again spoken of as female, as a daughter of God, present with him at the time of the Creation. (174)

What Paul Dombey fails to realize all along is that Florence (*his* wisdom) has, in fact, emanated from him. In other words, Florence is not merely “an essential part of the creative act” as a result of which little Paul can be looked upon as the sole successor of the Dombey economic totality, but she is “a part of the process [and, simultaneously, a product] of Creation”—“a daughter of [her procreative] God” (174).

Although the opening paragraph, by means of an almost entrancing repetitiveness, at first sight seems to reinforce the father’s master plot, the device of repetitiveness, as so often in Dickens, serves to undermine rather than to confirm what is repeated. The play with the perspectives undermines the absolute authority of the father from the start, thereby urging a quest for an alternative (father-daughter) dyad:

Dombey was about eight-and-forty years of age. Son about eight-and-forty minutes. Dombey was rather bald, rather red, [...]. Son was very bald, and very red, [...]. On the brow of Dombey, Time and his brother Care had set

some marks, [...] while the countenance of Son was crossed and recrossed with a thousand little creases, [...]. (*Dombey* 5)

The very basis of the master plot, the similarity between father and son, is described by the narrator in a playful and potentially subversive manner, indicating the extremely meagre basis for the likeness (and indicating that likeness, that is, metaphor, is an extremely meagre and arbitrary basis for making connections): redness and wrinkledness do connect the father and the son, and they do represent a kind of likeness, but it is a likeness that is certainly not spotted by the father, one that can only be noticed from an external and detached perspective (for instance, Florence Dombey's "in a corner" [7]), and thus these similarities are very far from constituting a reassuring foundation for a genealogical master plot. On the other hand, as the Time and Care allegory suggests, the novel proposes a very deep similarity or even identity between father and son: This is their shared humanness, their creatureliness, their mortality, features that cannot be reinforced or detected through similarity (that is, metaphor), but only asserted allegorically.

The supreme and exclusive importance of the Father-Son master plot is indicated by the fact that the mother is fully expendable in this plot: She is not more than a necessary vehicle of producing the son, thereby enabling the seamless continuity of the Father-Son narrative. Thus, as I stated earlier, Mrs Dombey is reduced to the status of a mere container in producing the son: a mother with the "capacity [...] to bring into existence any other kind of being" (Grosz 114).²⁸ Having fulfilled her reproductive function, she is disposable, and her

²⁸ According to the Platonic mother-as-*chora* idea, explains Grosz, "[b]eing a kind of pure permeability, infinitely transformable, inherently open to the specificities of whatever concrete it brings into existence, *chora* can have no attributes, no features of its own. [...]. It functions primarily as the receptacle, the storage point, the locus of nurturance." Thus, "[c]*hōra* can only be designated by its, by her, function: to hold, nurture, bring into the world. Not clearly an it or a she, *chora* has neither existence nor becoming. Not to procreate or produce [...] but to nurse, to support, surround, protect, incubate, to sort, or engender the worldly offspring of [the father]" (114, 115).

symbolic (textual) invisibility culminates very early in her physical demise, right after the birth of her son (*Dombey* 14).

From the father's viewpoint, the narrative can even survive acceptable losses (like the death of the mother) especially as the father can already see the future exaltation of his House in his son, his own reincarnated younger self, which points beyond a mere identity of names ("[t]his young gentleman has to accomplish a destiny" [7]). Dombey's fictional pattern, down even to its smallest details, demonstrates the nineteenth century's "unshaken faith in the structural reliability of the *genealogical imperative*" (Tobin 37, italics added). Several motifs in the very first chapter suggest the fervor of this paternal yearning for an undisturbed father-to-son genealogical process. One such motif is Dombey's watch: "Dombey, exulting in the long-looked-for event, jingled and jingled the heavy gold watch-chain that depended from below his trim blue coat, [...]. Son, [...] seemed, in his feeble way, to be squaring at existence for having come upon him so unexpectedly" (*Dombey* 5). While the watch itself seems to suggest the primacy of (patriarchal) temporality, the scene is subversive rather than assertive. For instance, the size of the timepiece and the infantile manner in which the father is using it suggest an uncertainty at the heart of the master plot. One could suggest that the jingle of the gold watch-chain stands for the ringing of the bells that would be, for the father, the adequate (that is, adequately ecclesiastical) response to the birth of his heir; on the other hand, it could also stand for the sound of a threatening death-knell by Dombey, the personified Chronos, a primordial deity from ancient Greek mythology known as the god of Time, who is waiting cannibalistically to swallow his new-born male child according to the first lines of the novel: "Dombey sat in the corner of the darkened room in the great armchair by the bedside, and Son lay tucked up warm in a little basket bedstead, carefully disposed on a low settee immediately in front of the fire and close to it; as if his constitution were analogous to that of a muffin, and it was essential to toast him brown while he was very new" (5).

The father's solipsistic self-absorption, beside the wish to accumulate profit, evokes the fantasy of cannibalistically appropriating his son, his exclusive heir, for his household, for his firm—even for the British Empire *per se*.

The opening scene, at the same time, signals the daughter's tenuous presence in the house. Her existence as a misplaced misfit forces her to become early a social hermaphrodite: a female member of the family whose every word and deed in the household, while reinforcing her physical presence, simultaneously excludes her from the symbolic order almost entirely.²⁹ Hence, Florence Dombey's appearance in the patriarchal structure of the household is a demonstration of her 'nonexistent' existence. She is first discovered—or occluded—as a series of emphatic paternal negations:

[U]ntil this present day [...] Mr Dombey [...] had had *no issue*.—To speak of; *none* worth mentioning. There had been a girl some six years before, and the child, who had stolen into the chamber unobserved, was now crouching timidly in a corner whence she could see her mother's face. But what was a girl to Dombey and Son! In the capital of the House's name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that *couldn't* be invested—a bad boy—*nothing* more. (*Dombey* 6-7, italics added)

The quotation, though indirectly, shows—from the father's perspective—the appropriate figurative social place or position of the only competent female family member in Paul Dombey's patriarchal establishment. However, what we see as spatial arrangement—from the daughter's viewpoint a kind of still-life in the reality of the novel—is at the same time the order of significance in the household.

²⁹ The name 'Florence' could be etymologically regarded as both a feminine and a masculine forename meaning, among other things, 'prosperous'—highly in contrast with the father's regard to his daughter.

Although Fanny Dombey, the mother, is temporarily the focus of the picture, her spectacle suggests nothing more than a misleading pseudo-centrality that is due to her fulfilled maternal duty in providing a son (the real center within the picture/paternal order). Her imminent death soon entails her final banishment from the symbolic order as a whole. She has done her ultimate marital duty to society in delivering a male heir to Mr Dombey after having “entered on that social contract of matrimony” (*Dombey* 6), and therefore, her demise cannot substantially upset the well-established (i.e., patrilineal) flow of events.

The mother’s death, then, does not disturb the father’s master plot. On the other hand, as it was suggested in the Introduction, the mother’s loss or absence is not necessarily an adverse circumstance for the daughter’s plot either. As Marianne Hirsch notes, “in Victorian fiction the distance between the heroine and her mother needed to be maintained” (97) for the sake of the daughter to be able to rise as the sole heroine of domestic fiction. And this is what gradually unfolds in *Dombey and Son* also, beginning with the establishment of a distinctive father-daughter-son domestic triangle.³⁰

We see on the one hand a cold, tyrannical *paterfamilias* whose main concern is to create the best possible domestic environment for the infant successor, so that his son may grow and develop into the head of the family as soon as possible. In fact, Mr Dombey does not take an interest in a young son, rather in a future adult Son who is meant to be his double; instead of the son’s body, it is the spiritual idea of the Son that concerns, or rather obsesses him. Little Paul Dombey appears very early in the novel as a precocious child, who, despite his often straight-to-the-point questions put to his father or sister, still seems like a ‘babe in the woods’ in the world. And there is Florence Dombey, a capable intruder into the father’s

³⁰ A somewhat similar family triangle as a dominant underlying plot pattern may also be observed in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*. After the mother’s death, Gaskell substitutes Mrs Hale with Mr Thornton to maintain the triangle that consists of a father, a daughter, and a third entity. In Gaskell’s “The Doom of the Griffiths” (1858), we see the triangle composed of Robert (father), Angharad (daughter), and Owen (son), and the ensuing restructuring of domestic power relations in times of death in the family.

genealogical plot, whose presence frequently disturbs what Mr Dombey considers the developing, plausible father-adult son harmony at home.

Florence Dombey, the misplaced misfit within the patriarchal system of the House—unlike her conforming mother, her aunt Mrs Chick and Mrs Chick’s friend Miss Tox—is no more than a negligible item among the vital statistical data (“some six years before” was she born [*Dombey* 7]) in the ‘domestic ledger’ of Dombey and Son, alluded to through her peripheral, barely visible presence in the delivery room (“stolen into the chamber unobserved” and “crouching timidly in a corner whence she could see her mother’s face” [7]) from where her mother is departing, and where her brother has just begun to exercise his yet rudimentary influence over his father.

The father’s financial metaphor of the coin further underlines Florence’s insignificance. Although her name may well allude to the former gold coin of England (the ‘florin,’ first issued under Edward III [1312-1377]), she is only “a piece of base coin,” debasing her in the eye of her father into “nothing more” than a worthless financial asset, a valueless flesh-and-blood entity (7). Florence is “a bad boy” (7) in the sense of a ‘flawed or faulty boy’, a reject, a worthless child, which implies that ‘a good girl,’ as a domestic category, is simply inconceivable in the patriarch’s vocabulary.³¹

Janet Beizer succinctly summarizes this cultural principle by stating that “the law of generations, represented symbolically by transmission of the father’s name, has become the Law. [...] [S]on replaces father, life redeems death. All seems recuperated within the paternal economy [‘economy’ in both its economic and soteriological connotation]” (44),

³¹ An unusually sharp contrast may be observed between the way Mr Dombey looks upon his daughter Florence, and the way the father (his name is not mentioned) looks upon his daughter Clara in Wilkie Collins’s *Basil*. One of the sons, Basil, narrates as follows: “Towards my sister, his [the father’s] demeanour always exhibited something of the old-fashioned, affectionate gallantry of a former age. He paid her the same attention that he would have paid to the highest lady in the land. He led her into the dining-room, when we were alone, exactly as he would have led a duchess into a banquetting-hall.” Basil, furthermore, remarks that “[i]f a servant failed in duty towards *him* [the father], the servant was often forgiven; if towards *her*, the servant was sent away on the spot. His daughter was in his eyes the representative of her mother: the mistress of his house, as well as his child. It was curious to see the mixture of high-bred courtesy and fatherly love in his manner” (10, italics in the original).

consequently, there seems to be no fundamental need in the family for the presence of a daughter who will lose her name (that is, her progenitor's name) when married.

The death of the mother, however, unavoidably draws attention to the daughter. Florence, a half-orphan after her mother's death, "attempts to play the role of maternal daughter [...] making advances to her father [as well] that are coldly, even viciously, rejected out-of-hand [...]. Dombey will not cooperate. Her every gesture increases his hostility" (Zwinger, "Fear" 425), by that demonstrating his rigid refusal of the emergence of a new domestic triangle in which the role of the daughter should receive substantially more paternal attention. Dombey's rejection of Florence is also his continued rejection of her mother's body, her physical reality as anything that exceeds the reproductive function. If Florence tries to replace the mother, she does so because she thinks that the mother's place in the household is simply vacant, unaware of the fact that the mother's place (once the heir has been born) is not empty but non-existent in this house. In one sense, Florence's invisibility is the repetition or continuation of the mother's invisibility beyond her only function. Paul Dombey does not need a mother surrogate for little Paul in the person of Florence for several reasons. For one thing, the presence of a mother figure would draw attention to the baby son as physical presence who requires maternal care, in other words, who is still imperfect. Hence, despite all of her maternal efforts, Florence is "waiting for the precious, ungraspable prize of her father's love" (Cockshut 1551) in vain. By refusing her help as a potential nurse functioning as a 'little mother' beside Paul (nursing, with its intrusive physicality, is itself inconceivable in the universe of Dombey), Mr Dombey, out of a perverse rivalry stemming from the wish for the exclusive possession of his son, negates his daughter's presence in the household in which, in her father's eye, she has never been symbolically present. By acting as a little mother, Florence could have demonstrated her social viability, since she as an "angelic woman is a figure who represents in the present the idealized mother of the past, continuing her miracle-

working powers” (Armstrong, *Dickens* 48); Mr Dombey, however, prevents Florence from miracle-working at home in his son’s life, thus forcing little Paul to live motherless. Frances Armstrong, at the same time, points out that Florence’s endeavor to become a ‘little mother’ beside her brother is the result of a deep-felt desire to create a loving domesticity out of the Dombey household. However, her “inborn homemaking instinct is almost extinguished by her father’s actions; Dickens shows with considerable insight how she forms tentative definitions of ‘home,’ tries to make changes in her own environment in accordance with her latest insights, and is forced again and again to revise or discard her ideas” (47-48), until she is to leave the Dombey house for good (*Dombey* 615). In this way, oddly enough, Mr Dombey provides her daughter with the chance to create a new (real) home for herself, for Walter Gay, and eventually for her father also (791-808).

Even though the House of Dombey, “[t]hat small world, like the great one out of doors, had the capacity of easily forgetting its dead” (24), Florence’s symbolic death or social nonexistence cannot be looked upon by her father in exactly the same way as her mother’s biological decease. Metaphorically speaking, “that small world” with all its social and financial aspects is seen by Paul Dombey as his own spiritual emanation or embodiment. That this reality, as an unassailable premiss, has been inculcated in little Paul is evident from his own reference to his father as “Dombey and Son” (146) (in the same vein, James Carker refers to Mr Dombey as “the presence of the very House” [167]). Accepting the father’s premise according to which the spiritual and conceptual has absolute precedence over the physical, little Paul inadvertently accepts the obliteration of his own physical existence, since, if Mr Dombey is both ‘Dombey’ and ‘Son,’ than in this fixed order he has no place. It could be argued that young Paul’s physical weakness is simply the consequence of the fact that, as a body, he is not real enough for his father. Weakness is both inevitably imposed and inadmissible in this household. The latter principle is spelt out by the female ideologue of the

Dombey domestic universe, Mrs Chick, one representative of the type of female that is tolerated in Dombey's system (others include Miss Tox and Susan Nipper, the nurse beside Florence). According to Mrs Chick, both physical and psychical weakness may have been the underlying problem leading to the death of the mother and her son:

Why were we born? [...] To make an effort. [...] We have but too much reason to suppose, [...] that if an effort had been made in time, in this family, a train of the most trying and distressing circumstances might have been avoided. Nothing shall ever persuade me, [...] but that, if that effort had been made by poor dear Fanny, the poor dear darling child would at least have had a stronger constitution. [...] Therefore, Florence, pray let us see that you have some strength of mind [...]. (*Dombey* 227)

Mrs Chick is right in identifying insufficient effort as the cause of Mrs Dombey's delicacy and death, but fails to see that this weakness or failure to make an effort is the result of Mr Dombey's philosophy that simply does not allow reality (life, fortitude) to physical existence, and therefore whoever is insufficiently imagined by Mr Dombey is doomed to decay and death.

There is also a misguided Darwinian context for Mrs Chick's speculations (her name might be a hint). An inadequate attitude to life in the Victorian social/scientific context is often tantamount to a genetically defined unfitness for life stemming from families where eligible women, as well as their family background, are afflicted with "a hereditary weakness" to be avoided (Kuper 92), or else, by all means to be fought against with preferable domestic circumstances since "[i]n order that woman should reach the same standard as man, she ought, when nearly adult, to be trained to *energy and perseverance*, and to have her reason

and imagination exercised to the highest point,” Charles Darwin writes, “and then she would probably transmit these qualities chiefly to her adult daughters” (860-61, italics added). In this way, Florence Dombey’s issues will have the chance to be males resembling Dombey even though under a different patronymic label—which fact, although weakening the social status of the Dombey lineage, strengthens the masculine, imperial, economic potential of the era through the person of Walter Gay, who is a real imperial hero, a seafaring adventurer, and a self-made man.

The son sired by Walter Gay is christened Paul partly as a homage to the grandfather, but also as an allusion to his not merely equal, but even stronger vitality and his ability to restore and manage the lost business empire: “Under the very eye of Mr Dombey, there is a foundation going on, upon which a—an Edifice [...] is gradually rising, perhaps to equal, perhaps excel, that of which he was once the head [...]. [F]rom his daughter, after all, another Dombey and Son will ascend [...] triumphant” (*Dombey* 806-807). The fact that Florence is necessary for the restoration of symbolic and economic stability suggests that the genuine domestic and economic order asserts rather than denies the physical body. However, before this reclamation could take place, the patriarch must suffer the temporary loss of an heir.

Little Paul’s death prepares the ground for the unfolding of the novel’s father-daughter plot which, after all—and despite Mr Dombey’s exclusive investment in his Father-Son master plot—does constitute the genuine organizing strand. The most significant moment of crisis in the main plotline is the scene in which Mr Dombey, losing his self-control, hits his daughter. The incident takes place as a consequence of two other losses: Edith Dombey (his matrimonial partner) elopes with James Carker (his business partner)—an ironical but apt punishment for Mr Dombey’s refusal to distinguish between home and business. Mr Dombey gradually loses everyone who is important to him and each loss—irrespective of its

circumstances—forces him to turn his thoughts to the only constant person beside him: his daughter.

While the loss of the first wife is made up for, at least, by a temporary heir, the loss of the second wife—who was practically bought by Mr Dombey—yields virtually nothing apart from bitterness, but again draws the paternal attention to the only remaining family member in the house, Florence, who quickly becomes a scapegoat, an object within easy reach for Mr Dombey to give vent to his blind anger as “he [...] struck her” (*Dombey* 615). To lend impetus to Paul Dombey’s behavior as an emerging madman, the physical violence is immediately preceded by repetitive, anaphoric narrative segments. When finding a letter from Edith, “[h]e read that she was gone. He read that he was dishonoured. He read that she had fled” (614). Athena Vrettos comments that in *Dombey and Son*, “[v]erbal repetitions frequently mark moments [...] which signal the tendency for minds to behave increasingly like machines” (416). While Vrettos’s point is valid, it is also remarkable that repetition, the mechanistic, guiding dynamic force of the novel, saturates the narrative in those scenes where the father’s diminishing social significance appears metonymically as, for instance, a ruinous house (in a textually overt form), or metaphorically, as a sinking ship (in a textually covert form) (*Dombey* 761, 765-66, 769). Chapter 59 elaborately depicts the consequences of the ‘daughterless’ drifting state of the father, where the absence of the daughter is tantamount to his willing himself to die on his own house-turned-bier (a sacrifice on his own altar of perversity), without the presence of a female social (and sociable) redeemer.

The father’s deranged mental state emerges before us, in true gothic fashion, as the gradual disintegration of his house (home) which is identical, more than anywhere else in the book, with his business house: Dombey, albeit only temporarily, becomes placeless or homeless in his own universe. It is virtually impossible to read this chapter without imagining him behind every instance of repeated appearance of the words: ‘house,’ ‘furniture,’ or ‘ruin.’

At the same time the narrator lays great stress on the disturbing repetition of key sentences concerning the House as a sinking (commercial) ship; that is, on the ever hidden *domus* in the name of Dombey: “[The House] is a ruin, *and the rats fly from it*” (*Dombey* 761, 765, 766, italics added),³² until we find at one crucial point that “[t]he house is such a ruin that the rats have fled, and there is not [even] one left” (769). Flying rats (departing servants from the “lower regions” of the house [762]) symbolize the irreversible sinking of the ship called Dombey and Son, whose ignoble disappearance in the devouring sea (“herds of shabby vampires,” “fluffy and snuffy strangers,” “quiet, calculating spirits” [765, 766]—all eager to participate in an auction serving as the commercial event marking the disintegration of the household as paternal establishment) must precede the transformative resurrection of the literal building or the noble/ business House, in other words, Paul Dombey himself: the man behind the all-pervasive notion of his own patriarchal symbolism.³³

If Dombey here is looked upon as a sinking ship, then Florence may well be regarded as either the missing rudder/compass at best, or at worst, the indispensable *ad hoc* stopgap to the cultural/financial leak brought about by Edith Dombey and James Carker (in the case of which she is resorted to only when there remains no one else in Dombey’s self-made, and at the same time, self-ruined cosmos to turn to for cultural redemption). However, Florence’s consequent authorial relegation to placelessness within her father’s world is to be the indispensable key to their mutual transformation. In this way, by the end of the novel,

³² The italicized, thematic, metaphorical repetition stressing the severity of a man’s social-economic downfall appears also in *The Old Curiosity Shop* when Sampson Brass comments: “But I am a falling house, and the rats (if I may be allowed to the expression in reference to a gentleman I respect and love beyond everything) fly from me!” (370).

³³ To enhance the auction’s dramatic nature (the symbolic death throes or the profane threnody of Dombey), Dickens combines repetition with an imposing proper noun creation concerning the house’s interior which is, after all, the house/House itself vanishing in three climactic steps: “The Capital Modern Household Furniture, &c., is on view. [...] The Capital Modern Household Furniture, &c., is on sale. [...] The Capital Modern Household Furniture, &c., is in course of removal” (*Dombey* 766). This repetitive series reminds one of the classical closing sentence of a bidding (Going, going, gone.), alluding to the seemingly ultimate, ephemeral economic significance of a formerly strong House.

Dombey becomes a caring father figure enabling Florence to become the paternally accepted vehicle, a *iustus genetrix*, to give birth to heir(s) to the House.

The previous reference to the madman-machine analogy is especially important in the case of Paul Dombey as he consciously endeavors to appear immutable (that is, functioning as a machine) throughout the novel in his human relationships both at work and at home. Immutability *per se* is a much-desired feature of a fictional character functioning as a father-as-king within the master plot who simultaneously creates and imposes his own governing laws; still, even though, “[n]ineteenth-century fiction do display the father [as a ruler], [...] they ultimately undermine his status, his authority, and his power as lawgiver and regulator of family, social and narrative codes. The nineteenth-century text [...] repeatedly undercuts the proffered images of its own authority” (Beizer 4).³⁴ Not surprisingly, Mr Dombey, the king of his own world, undergoes a similar loss of image, which is, on the one hand, a direct consequence of the business and matrimonial betrayal of James Carker and Edith Dombey; on the other hand, his disempowerment is a narrative *sine qua non* being no longer a part of the “outmoded hierarchical model,” the “great chain which linked mortal beings to the Divine through the mediation of kings” (181). Put another way, without the Divine presence, Dombey cannot fulfill the role of a king-as-mediator at least for two possible reasons: (i) There is no God to serve by connecting people to him, or (ii) although God exists, a previously supposed undisturbed relationship is no longer self-evident between Him and His earthly representatives, the monarchs. God’s presence and signification fade in the imagination of people; in the same way, the father-as-king gradually loses his import in the

³⁴ It is already observable at the beginning of the century when Amelia Opie’s *The Father and Daughter* (1801) was published staging the relationship of an initially authoritative father figure (Mr Fitzhenry) and his daughter (Agnes). Ironically, the strong father who feels compelled early in the book to support the foundation of a mental asylum, finally becomes an inmate himself within the self-same institution following a serious nervous breakdown, as a result of which he ceases to recognize his own daughter and desperately needs her support in the struggle for his sanity.

affairs (business and domestic alike) in the novel.³⁵ And if people do not stand in awe of God, the ultimate sustainer of creation, they will not be respectful of His worldly representative either.

Florence's physical displacement serves only as an accelerator in the so far surreptitious process of the decline of her father's social status; and to be able to grasp the depth and significance of Dombey's ruin, the narrator compares him, recalling the Oriental symbolism mentioned earlier in this chapter, to an ancient ruler and Oriental despot, Nebuchadnezzar, whose metaphorical appearance in the Bible as a nearly destroyed tree (Daniel 4) is powerfully invoked in the novel also: "Shaken as he is by his disgrace, he is not yet humbled to the level earth. The root is broad and deep, and in the course of years its fibers have spread out and gathered nourishment from everything around it. The tree is struck, but not down" (*Dombey* 660). The prophet Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar, by interpreting his (the king's) dream, that he will go temporarily insane, during which period the right to rule will be taken away from him; after that humbling period, however, he will regain his sanity as well as his kingship and kingdom. What the king sees and hears in his dream is that someone is to

[h]ew down the tree [i.e., the king], and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, [...], let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; [...] (*Authorized Version*, Daniel 4:14-16).

³⁵ Just like Dombey's family relations are conducted, instead of him, by several less significant characters in and beyond the Dombey House (Mrs Chick, Susan Nipper, Mrs Toodle—Miss Tox, Major Bagstock, Walter Gay), Dombey's business relations are also conducted, instead of him, by certain professional surrogates like James Carker (the most important business and even domestic messenger), Mr Morfin, and Mr Clark.

The “heart” in the quotation is the metaphorical representation of the mind, that is, the alteration in which the king’s heart transforms into a beast’s heart is equivalent to becoming insane, acting like a madman. What can be observed as an anticipation in both the biblical text and the novel is the possibility for Dombey to undergo an ultimate social resurrection resulting in a future regeneration as social rehabilitation: “The tree is struck, but not down,” moreover, “leave the stump of his roots in the earth” (*Dombey* 660; *Authorized Version*, Daniel 4:15). When Dombey is confronted with his wife and head clerk’s betrayal, one of the severest blows on his self-built world order, shaking its very foundation, he is no longer capable of suppressing his anger; therefore, striking his daughter serves as an emotional valve by which he reacts to the altered, adverse circumstances around him—projecting his impotent rage on Florence. As a result, “she saw him murdering that fond idea to which she had held in spite of him.³⁶ She saw his cruelty, neglect, and hatred dominant above it, and stamping it down. She saw she had no father upon earth, and ran out, *orphaned*, from his house” (*Dombey* 615, italics added). This is the moment when it becomes clear for Florence Dombey that she has always been a *metoikos* in the patriarchal domestic frame of reference. The eruption of violence is proof for her that her father is more than an idea, an archetype of patriarchal projection upon the Dombey domestic establishment; still, he, a flesh-and-blood entity, has just committed a symbolic murder against himself and his daughter simultaneously by destroying a positive paternal idea of a father. Mr Dombey’s behavior towards his daughter risks even the business success of his firm. As Nancy Armstrong writes, “eighteenth-century English law generally considered violence a man’s prerogative, the exercise of which legitimated his authority. It was perfectly all right—indeed, even socially necessary—for the masculine head of household to subdue by force the women under his authority,” however, points out Armstrong, “[w]ithin less than a century, [...] any such show of violence would

³⁶ The Dombey-Florence relationship in its nature may even remind us of the oscillation of the Lear-Cordelia relationship in Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (1608): *status quo*, alienation, then reunion.

indeed be scrupulously avoided by people of the middle ranks who wanted to succeed in business. In the two decades following the Peterloo Massacre (1819), a household that was harmonious as well as prosperous became as good as money in the bank” (Armstrong, “Captivity” 379).

The use of the word “murder” in the quotation above implies finality anticipating the unwillingness—again on Mr Dombey’s part—to reconceive the Dombey household. By identifying Florence’s state figuratively as “orphaned,” the narrator draws attention to a kind of “literary murder” (Beizer 41) committed by Paul Dombey *on* himself. This can be labeled as a type of “[self-]parricide,”³⁷ which “nullifies [paternity] utterly” meaning that “the paternal symbol is effaced,” generating “more far reaching consequences” (41). It may be added that “it is here the father’s *position* which is [i.e., has become] absent, nonexistent: all signifying systems are endangered, because the ultimate signifier has come undone” (41-42, italics in the original). One could argue that the violence is necessary for the father-daughter plot of this particular novel, for it is through Florence that the absolute supremacy of the spiritual and conceptual is finally questioned. If Dombey has constructed his world according to his plan, Florence, despite all the paternal abuse, has contributed to the maintenance of this order by seeing and worshiping the spiritual father instead of noticing the actual father. Thus, it is only through Florence that Dombey can destroy the foundation of his own fantasy construction, that is, himself as an idea of beneficial and efficient paternity. By becoming a person, revealing more than mechanical, rudimentary ‘emotional sparks’ toward his daughter, instead of strengthening at least his position if not his existence as a real human being, Paul Dombey becomes absent from the system of which he has always been the primary authentication.

³⁷ The word ‘parricide’ does appear in the text, in the disturbed speech of Mr Toots (*Dombey* 651), who considers the manner of his earlier, crude amorous approach to Florence tantamount to someone killing a father; that is, Mr Toots’s frivolous behavior as a prospective son-in-law creates the caricature of a mature son figure out of himself, thereby figuratively killing the serious-minded Mr Dombey who, in time, is supposed to leave his firm to such a plausible son surrogate.

However, it is not only Florence who leaves the House “orphaned,” (*Dombey* 615) but at the same time, her father also ‘leaves his House bereaved’ in a symbolic sense by breaking the last psychological cord between himself and his daughter. What has remained of their barely visible father-daughter bond seems to be irreversibly disrupted; still, as Kathleen Tillotson reminds us, “[t]he relation between Mr Dombey and Florence is the backbone of the *whole* book,” (119, italics added). For Paul Dombey,

Florence may serve [...] as an externalized conscience, a troublesome and even hated reminder of the whole world of feeling [...] because something within him responds to her. Before Paul’s birth, he had been merely indifferent; afterward this indifference turns to uneasiness and resentment, which increase after Paul’s death. But in this resentment there is an unadmitted sense of guilt, and even the seeds of repentance. (122)

Tillotson’s view is clearly supported by the passage in which Paul Dombey’s vein of thinking based on unalterable exclusivity and prejudice in his relation to little Paul and Florence is unfolding. Following his son’s death, Mr Dombey, instead of mourning, yields to melancholy, through which the depth of his resentment toward his daughter becomes evident:

One child was gone, and one child left. Why was the object of his hope removed instead of her? The sweet, calm, gentle presence in his fancy, moved him to no reflection but that. She had been unwelcome to him from the first; she was an aggravation of his bitterness now. If his son had been his only child, and the same blow had fallen on him, it would have been heavy to bear; but infinitely lighter than now, when it might have fallen on her (whom he

could have lost, or he believed it, without a pang), and had not. Her loving and innocent face rising before him, had no softening or winning influence. He rejected the angel, and took up with the tormenting spirit crouching in his bosom. Her patience, goodness, youth, devotion, love, were as so many atoms in the ashes upon which he set his heel. He saw her image in the blight and blackness all around him, not irradiating but deepening the gloom. (*Dombey* 263-64)

Florence, despite the several positive attributes enumerated, can only deepen her father's grief at this point; still, without sinking to the lowest psychological state in the father-daughter relationship, Mr Dombey has no chance to change, to rise, that is, to undergo symbolic redemption. It is not enough to accept the death of his son, he must transform his view concerning the symbolic value of his daughter, too. This transformation entails a thorough repentance; yet, before Mr Dombey's "seeds of repentance" (Tillotson 122) begin to manifest themselves, he must undergo a gradual psychological and mental regeneration, as a consequence of which his daughter, at the end of the novel, is able to discover a tangible father figure.

Early in the book, however, the case is different. At home, in a meticulously described part of his house, Dombey is seen as the victim of his own self-imprisonment. Posing like a jailor become inmate in his self-imposed 'splendid isolation', he very early effectively alienates himself from his household. Mrs Polly Toodle, who is called Richards by Dombey, sees the *paterfamilias* as follows:

[W]hen Mr Dombey was at his breakfast [...] as well as in the afternoon when he came home to dinner, a bell was rung for Richards to repair to this glass

chamber, and there walk to and fro with her young charge. From the glimpses she caught of Mr Dombey at these times, sitting in the dark distance, looking out towards the infant from among the dark heavy furniture [...] she began to entertain ideas of him in his solitary state, as if he were a lone prisoner in a cell, or a strange apparition that was not to be accosted or understood.
(*Dombey* 25)

Richards, an outsider dragged inside the family circle, looks upon the father as the embodiment of his own gloomy, impervious (jail)house who is not willing to be penetrated. “Mr Dombey came to be [...] invested in his own person, to her simple thinking, with all the mystery and gloom of his house.” And “[a]s she walked up and down the glass room, [...] she would sometimes try to pierce the gloom beyond, [...] however, she never dared to pry in that direction but very furtively and for a moment at a time. Consequently she made out nothing, and Mr Dombey in his den remained a very shade” (26). Dombey’s home as a prison may well remind us of Stone Lodge, the (guard)house of Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times* (9, 44). Paul Dombey and Thomas Gradgrind both fall a victim to their own self-absorbing solipsism, their willingly embraced mental incarceration, just like Nell Trent’s grandfather and William Dorrit in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (116, 138) and *Little Dorrit* (65, 478).

Dombey’s occasional physical absence from the main plot is transformed into a barely approachable economic presence before Florence in a *mise-en-abîme* when she is literally lost and asks for help—a subplot which “reflect[s] and refract[s] the energies of the main plots” (Reed 179). The subsequent dialogue illuminates a seemingly unshakeable paternal social framework based on exclusion, in this case beyond the household proper, in which she has no share, being a girl, since her presence cannot at all enhance the commercial capability of the City (more precisely, the firm of Dombey and Son). Consequently, she has to “be off,” since

the male representatives of the firm “haven’t got anything for [her]” (*Dombey* 74). Florence’s response, the import of which is not yet fully recognized by her, is worded with revelatory force: “I don’t want anything, thank you, [...]. Except to know the way to Dombey and Son’s” (74). Not wanting anything, but at the same time desiring the way to Dombey and Son’s is a contradictory statement since Florence both literally and figuratively wishes to gain access to that circumscribed patriarchal universe whose creator, Paul Dombey, is the biblically exemplified “all in all” (48, in the *Authorized Version*, I Corinthians 15:28)—and this is felt to be everything for a daughter being treated as a “virtual orphan, since her father tends to treat her as if she did not exist” (Yelin 300). Then and there, the daughter does not desire the privilege of being a socially acknowledged part of the father and his son’s company, but simply to find the way to the headquarters of the business establishment. In this way, perhaps, she guesses on her part the ‘right way’ to the father himself who is to become, in the latter half of the novel, a real father (figure) evolving out of an economic symbol that has always been there behind the impersonal establishment.

The interlocutor, Mr Clark (a clerk of Mr Dombey’s), is unable or unwilling to understand Florence’s intention, so he asks her: “Why, what can *you* want with Dombey and Son’s?” (*Dombey* 74, italics added). Florence, beginning to feel the taste of orphanhood, can only repeat her previous laconic demand: “To know the way there” (74). Her physical movement from the plight of being lost to the state of being found, from the open wharf, a bulwarklike discursive space to the closed office building, the epitomic discursive space of worldwide commercial transactions; that is, from placelessness to the state of possessing an accepted social position beside her father, also entailing her economic (re)evaluation, is such a tremendous progress that even an ordinary clerk reacts to it by “rub[bing] the back of his head so hard in his wonderment that he knocked his own hat off” (74), thereby suggesting the

preposterous nature of the request.³⁸ Mr Clark's shock is, to a degree, justified even by the fact that Florence's clothes (the visible symbols of her position) have previously been taken away from her, thus, when she asks for help, she is not just a girl (a woman), but seemingly a poor, tattered homeless child, too.

Walter Gay, a young boy and Mr Dombey's future son-in-law/son surrogate, is given the task to show Florence the way home (that is, to the paternally sanctified social status, the resurrected House), which errand even he can only gradually accomplish (being a *pariah* in the eyes of Dombey for a long time after little Paul's death).

Paul Dombey's attitude, as a response to his daughter's domestic presence, reveals his indifference at best and uneasiness and resentment at worst stemming from that unshakable bond between the dying mother and the daughter in the mother's death scene, in which he, as father, has no share (or, according to his commercial vein of thinking, he has no 'shares').

Looking at them as if from a distance by a river, he sees them "at the bottom of [...] clear depths of tenderness and truth, [...] those two figures clasped in each other's arms, while he stood on the bank above them, looking down a mere spectator—not a sharer with them—quite shut out" (*Dombey* 31). The monstrosity of the river, the symbol of an ominously silent grave(yard), halts the father, forcing him to briefly consider this specific mother-daughter dyad, and to inadvertently compare it with his own relationship with his daughter.

The ostensibly insurmountable distance between the father and the mother is exactly the same as between the father and the daughter, which means that if the mother is literally dead to the father, then the daughter must necessarily be also dead (though symbolically) to him. Dombey's attitudes represent an extreme form of the idea of fatherhood, at least as it is

³⁸ In Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), an experienced elderly lady, Madame Merdle, warns the young female protagonist, Isabel Archer, that in the oppressive, patriarchal society of the nineteenth-century "a woman, it seems [...], has no natural place anywhere; wherever she finds herself she has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl" (182), which crawling can, for instance, manifest itself in commuting between divorced and irresponsible parents in Maisie Farange's life in James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897). Florence Dombey's walk of life within the strict confines of her father's world is hardly more hopeful than the 'crawling' of Isabel or Maisie.

characterized by Luigi Zoja in his book on the historical constructions of fatherhood: “[t]he father’s condition [...] is based on the total repression of all the facets of his personality which are alien to the assertion of authority. [...] So, the father’s attempt to prune his personality of everything that diminishes his authority, or which simply counts as sentimental, is forced to grow ever more radical. In other words, the truly ‘solid’ father, psychologically as well as socially, has need of a suit of armor not only in his relations with other fathers and in dealing with the members of his family, but also with respect to himself” (94). Zoja points out, furthermore, that “[o]ne doesn’t step out of one’s suit of armor: one wears it even in the absence of any threat of aggression, and even in the company of one’s wife and children,” thus, not surprisingly, “[a]n individual who is always dressed in a suit of armor grows accustomed to a limited range of rigid movements” (94), both physically and emotionally, which results in a distance between Dombey and almost everyone else in the household. The only exception is, of course, his son: the necessary family member who only is able to guarantee the subsistence of the House.

The narrator reveals very early that Mr Dombey’s “feelings of indifference towards little Florence changed into an uneasiness of an extraordinary kind” (*Dombey* 31), culminating in the morbid fear of losing little Paul in the battle for the son’s attention. That is why Mr Dombey maintains a marked distance between himself and his daughter. As if it were not enough, he expresses the necessity of creating “sufficient alienations” (134) between his son and his daughter by sending Paul to Doctor Blimber’s boarding school, which “would wean him by degrees” from Florence (134). The word “wean” alludes to Florence as a capable mother surrogate who, nevertheless, even in this useful domestic position remains undesirable for the father; yet, Mr Dombey “was afraid that he might come to hate her” (31-32), at least because even he cannot negate his daughter’s efficiency in domestic tasks pertaining to his son, still to be done by him or his sister Mrs Chick.

Yet, at the beginning of the novel, Florence's presence and behavior remind one rather of a court jester before her rigid father, aunt, and her little brother:

Mr Dombey stood frigidly watching his little daughter, who, clapping her hands, and standing on tip-toe before the throne of his son and heir, lured him to bend down from his high estate, and look at her. Some honest act of Richards's may have aided the effect, but he did look down, and held his peace. As his sister hid behind her nurse, he followed her with his eyes; and when she peeped out with a merry cry to him, he sprang up and crowed lustily—laughing outright when she ran in upon him; and seeming to fondle her curls with his tiny hands, while she smothered him with kisses. (*Dombey* 56)

Paul Dombey, the symbolic king of his world, albeit reluctantly, tolerates the presence of his undesired subject, his daughter, as long as the “son and heir” is alive whom Florence can serve as required. When, however, the Dombey heir dies, the court jester's presence becomes increasingly superfluous,³⁹ until the father finds himself in his self-created dismal, private/professional vacuum culminating in economic as well as metaphoric bankruptcy. From this impasse—either directly or indirectly—only his daughter can save him (803-808), that is why Ian Milner reminds us in connection with the main plot of the novel that “‘Dombey and Son’ is merely the necessary prelude to the central theme of ‘Dombey and Daughter’ ” (477).

³⁹ For the sake of Mr Dombey's social reanimation, Dickens makes the ‘son and heir’ die almost three times in the novel, as beside young Paul Dombey, a boat named *Son and Heir*—with Walter Gay aboard, who is Florence's future husband, the new ‘son and heir’—is rumored to be lost at sea along with the ship (*Dombey* 428).

However, symbolic salvation of a father having a daughter in Dickens's fiction must always be preceded by a series of shocking confrontations between him and his female child. Confrontations between the father and the daughter enable and, at the same, compel both of them to (re)examine the power relations at home through their partial fulfillment of domestic roles or functions—the examination of which will be the focus of the next chapter on *Hard Times*.

Chapter 2. Wheels within Wheels at Home:
The Mechanistic Father and His Malfunctioning Daughter
in *Hard Times*

[D]o you notice how, three hundred miles beyond the end of telegraph cables and mail-boat lines, the haggard utilitarian lies of our civilisation wither and die, to be replaced by pure exercises of imagination, that have the [...] charm, and sometimes the deep hidden truthfulness, of works of art?

(Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* 168)

Not long after *Dombey and Son*, Dickens wrote one of his shortest novels, *Hard Times*, in which a dystopian superstructure of an experimental social order is depicted in a fictitious industrial town (Coketown), while, in the domestic plot, we have a dramatic transformation of a malfunctioning father-daughter relationship. “Dickens returns in *Hard Times* to the central question of *Dombey and Son*: what use is the daughter?” writes Hilary M. Schor, reminding us that, “[a]s in the earlier novel, he finds a variety of ways to test the daughter’s true worth; and as in *Dombey and Son*, he allies the daughter’s plot to the economic critique at the novel’s core,” (*Dickens* 72), attacking the Gradgrind philosophy that reigns in Coketown, an extreme version of Victorian utilitarianism.⁴⁰ As Paul A. Olson remarks, “*Hard Times* is not only about characters and events. It mythologizes the central power relations of the new utopian order—and then satirizes them” (236). The central father-daughter relationship can be read as a domestic version of the Coketown dystopia, a sustained commentary on the untenable nature of Coketown’s entire social structure.

⁴⁰ Olson deals extensively with the influence of utilitarianism upon the nineteenth-century British educational system, noting that “[t]hough Dickens deals with some form of education in most of his novels, only in *Hard Times* does he consider [...] Utilitarians. [...] It excoriates [William] Ellis, [George] Combe, and the schools they created, the schoolmasters and teachers they promoted, and the pedagogical styles they made canonical” (228).

Mrs Sparsit (a housekeeper with aristocratic pedigree) declares that the people in Coketown all “live in a singular world” (*Hard Times* 152). This “singular world,” however, is in many ways the Victorian world as such; and the malfunctioning father-daughter dyad (unlike *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Little Dorrit*) singularly emphasizes the untenable nature of a dystopian father-daughter relationship. However, *Hard Times* is like *Dombey and Son* in the sense that the domestic father-daughter scenario is clearly intended as a social and political allegory. In the former novel, the domestic regime is represented in the context provided by the Dombey business empire, while in *Hard Times*, the larger context is a dystopian city. Thus, one larger stake of both novels is the nature of Britain and Britishness. In both domestic regimes, the daughter, seems to have no choice but to conform entirely to her father’s demands and to his artificial universe—both within and beyond the male-controlled domestic sphere.

The present chapter investigating the scientifically constructed father-daughter dyad will suggest that the father figure—although consistently negating the values of emotions—can finally obtain symbolic redemption only through his daughter, Louisa Gradgrind, in his household. Louisa, however, is not the only daughter in the family. But, oddly enough, Jane Gradgrind, the other female child, is barely mentioned in the novel. There is not a single dialogue between her and her father or mother; her sporadic appearance strongly indicates that she is merely an item hidden among the empty statistical data of the Gradgrind economy. And since Jane does not act as an associate in redeeming the father, Dickens creates a stepdaughter, Sissy Jupe, with whom Louisa can finally find and re-form their symbolically lost father. In this process, the son figures, Tom and Bitzer, assist Louisa and Sissy only marginally.

It is primarily Louisa Gradgrind who is able to prove the father that deep inside, behind his mechanistic paternal *façade*, a real, caring, emotionally functional parent exists,

who is even willing to sacrifice his ethos, his fact-laden economic system, to save his children from the philosophy forcibly promoted by himself. Since the father, Thomas Gradgrind, is one of the most important representatives of the town's scientific and ultimately dystopian attitude to life. His daughter is, in fact, obliged to save him from his own mindset, a well-defined socioeconomic system, while working on a step-by-step (re)creation of a domestic *milieu* based on what Dickens sees as sound human values.

Whereas in *Dombey and Son* the father figure, as long as his son is alive, is chiefly preoccupied with young Paul's ascension to the throne of the firm, after the death of his son, he indignantly objects to that fact that his son, rather than his daughter, has been taken away from him. In *Hard Times* the case is notably the opposite.

Though there are several male children in the Gradgrind household, the eldest female child (Louisa Gradgrind), within the circle of his prominent *sons*,⁴¹ is repeatedly called by the father the "favourite child" (80, 174, 189), singularly referring to her as "the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system" (171), even, and most notably, as "his sheet-anchor" (198).

In order to rub in the allegorical significance of the central dyad of the mechanistically moving, yet psychologically hardly living father figure, and his no less artificially constructed daughter, Dickens surrounds them, as is his habit, with plenty of narrative details incidental to the main plot (often seemingly independent plot lines as seemingly insignificant fragments⁴²), indicating the positions of the two protagonists even before they themselves give voice to their opinions about domestic issues. Dickens, moreover, lays uncommon stress on the unchangeable rigidity of the spatial background of the plot-lines so that any human change—however insignificant it should seem—may magnify the anticipated failure of the father,

⁴¹ To inculcate his children's mind with his economic philosophy as early as possible, the father, to create domestic signposts, names his male children after prominent thinkers to provide for them paragons, such as Adam Smith (economist and moral philosopher, 1723-1790), and Thomas Robert Malthus (economist and demographer, 1766-1834). Both scholars, to a degree, may be counted among the promoters of utilitarianism.

⁴² See, for instance, the plots dealing with Sissy Jupe and her father (*Hard Times* Bk. 1, Ch. 6), Rachel and Stephen Blackpool (Bk. 1, Ch.10), or James Harthouse and young Thomas Gradgrind (Bk. 2, Ch. 2-3).

consequently the failure of his insensitive social system. This, in fact, means that Dickens, for the sake of the contrast between human characteristics ready to change and the surrounding industrial town ready to stifle any change “vividly describes in his imagined Coketown the regularized, mechanized life lived according to the factory clock” (Sussman 147):

It [Coketown] contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hour, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next. (*Hard Times* 18)

Everything and everybody is “like one another” existing in an artificial world, acting (living, working) in the same way, recalling the Biblical phrase: “yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (*Authorized Version*, Hebrews 12:8). It is as if there were either no need or no possibility to change anything, the town in its entirety being the embodiment of an ever moving, ever working, machine as the sole savior of the population: to save the people from their own budding imagination. In the light of Coketown’s description above, (character) development is hardly imaginable. The all-pervading human agent of this world is introduced in typical Dickensian fashion in a paragraph of corrosive satire:

Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir—peremptorily Thomas—Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a

pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. You might hope to get some other nonsensical belief into the head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind (all supposititious, non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind—no, sir! (*Hard Times* 4)

The excessive repetition of the father's full name and the monotonous anaphorical structure: "A man [...]," replicates the Gradgrind philosophy in its verbal structure, also evoking the style of a military training officer who is hammering the essence of authority into the recruits, while also anticipating the summary judgment on the father by the adventurer James Harthouse: "a machine" (182).⁴³ Perfect repetition (the reproduction of the same) is the founding principle of Coketown's mechanistic philosophy, and the human world—represented chiefly by Louisa—is the world which acknowledges the impossibility of such repetition.

Into this seemingly well-established and smoothly functioning paternal world Louisa Gradgrind is introduced—initially as an incongruous statistical figure, only to become the agent of change. At first, Louisa appears, like Florence Dombey, placeless and homeless in her father's world, "a light with nothing to rest upon, a file with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow" (11). In the eyes of her immoral brother, Tom,⁴⁴ and his bosom friend, James Harthouse, she is "a blank slate that can be written to their specifications" (Schor, "Novels" 64). It is only her father who, to some extent, can see

⁴³ John Stuart Mill, a possible archetype of Thomas Gradgrind, sheds some light on the analytic nature of the father when he labels himself twice in his autobiography as a kind of machine: "a dry, hard logical machine," and "a mere reasoning machine" (qtd. in Robson and Stillinger 110, 111).

⁴⁴ Albeit Josiah Bounderby frequently refers to the elder Thomas Gradgrind in the novel as 'Tom,' in my dissertation only Mr Gradgrind's son will be labeled with this nickname.

through the mask which hides a growing, changing, maturing daughter, altogether different from the accepted Coketown norm: “She was a child now, of fifteen or sixteen; but at no distant day would seem to become a woman all at once. Her father thought so as he looked at her. She was pretty. Would have been self-willed (he thought in his eminently practical way) but for her bringing up” (*Hard Times* 11). At this point, Gradgring is congratulating himself for having successfully domesticated Louisa’s difference through his invariable and predictable domestic *milieu*: “life at Stone Lodge went monotonously round like a piece of machinery which discouraged human interference” (44), as though the family lived in a high-security prison which only in the manner above would be able to guarantee a desired educational environment. Thus, Stone Lodge is made to appear as a kind of narratorial projection of both the father’s incarcerating mindset and the no less incarcerating, wider paternal world.

Mr Gradgrind is a kind of God, who lives in the midst of his creatures (his children), and his creation (Coketown society), even if not always in his physical self, but at least through his cultural impetus. Yet, to a certain extent, he stays apart from his created world (geographically) to be able to maintain his symbolic sacredness or saintliness.⁴⁵ Till the very end, Thomas Gradgrind tries posing as the self-appointed god of the novel’s universe, and not just a link in the “great chain which linked mortal beings to the Divine through the mediation of kings” (Beizer 181). As in the Biblical story of the Fall and of the subsequent distortion of the created world, it is through a woman (Louisa) that Mr Gradgrind’s perfect world gradually falls apart, and he must face the fact that “the chain of authority is undone, [...] [he] can be no more than a severed link, deprived of his sacred lineage and hence divested of his transcendent power” (182).

⁴⁵ The denotation of the word ‘saint’ in biblical contexts is, among other things, a reference to “one separated from the world” (*Easton’s Bible Dictionary*).

Although Dickens presents Gradgrind as embodying each link (man, king, God) in the Beizerian “chain of authority,” in the moment of his fall, the lack of divine, royal—as well as human—attributes become painfully evident; and he is revealed as a machine, the mechanical creator of a mechanical world. During the intimate and climactic moments between him and his daughter Louisa, he is revealed as nothing but an inadequate father who cannot even respond to his daughter’s domestic failure concerning her Bounderby household angelhood. Closing a long conversation, Louisa begs her father to act as her personal savior who can rescue her from the life imposed on her: “All that I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me. Now, father, you have brought me to this. Save me by some other means!” (*Hard Times* 171). The daughter’s domestic failure signals the irreparable rupture in the father’s symbolic power.

The local philosophical system, as the backbone of the school’s curriculum, is inculcated in childhood, thereby guaranteeing domestic fault-lines in adulthood:

Herein lay the spring of the mechanical art and mystery of educating the reason without stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections. Never wonder. By means of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, settle everything somehow, and never wonder. Bring to me, says M’Choakumchild [the local teacher], yonder baby just able to walk, and I will engage that it shall never wonder. (39)

What is seen here is not simply a well-defined aim to nip the development of emotions in the bud; the ultimate goal is rather the fully controlled limitation of free thinking by prescribing the only useful mental processes for growing children. At the same time, M’Choakumchild’s statement evokes the authoritarian school scene early in the novel with the three

representative male figures present. Both that early scene and the statement above can be regarded as an introductory (Gradgrindian) manifesto of manliness, according to which “[I]ike honour [...] manliness must be validated by other men, in its reality as actual or potential violence, and certified by recognition of membership of the group of ‘real men’. A number of rites of institution, especially in educational or military milieux,” adds Pierre Bourdieu, “include veritable tests of manliness oriented towards the reinforcement of male solidarity” (52), which is indispensable for the permanent support of Coketown’s male philosophy to be able to create students like Bitzer in the local school.⁴⁶ This kind of manliness is the prerequisite of the total paternal control at home that very early becomes a natural addition to the Gradgrind children’s culturalization. Hence, it is self-evident that Louisa is expecting a solution to her dysfunctional marriage from her father, the symbolic source of her wrecked adulthood.

The mother, who in a less male-dominated cultural context could have been a pivotal point in her children’s life—especially in times of decision-making—is no longer alive when Louisa resorts to her father to obtain domestic redemption. The mother’s death, however, can barely be regarded as a self-sacrificial act to enable Louisa to become a little mother to her siblings. She dies in the novel partly as a consequence of her parental failure. Her exclusive role in her children’s life is merely her being the vessel through whom the Gradgrind children enter the father’s distorted symbolic order. Mrs Gradgrind’s first appearance suggests her ineptitude as a mother, which contributes to her daughter’s subsequent failure as a wife:

⁴⁶ John Tosh calls manliness a “slippery concept,” pointing out that “[i]n nineteenth-century England the word was used in an extraordinary variety of contexts and it was repeatedly pushed in fresh directions by religious writers and social theorists, often in mutually inconsistent ways. In the name of manliness Victorian men were urged to work, to pray, to stand up for their rights, to turn the other cheek, to sow wild oats, to be chaste and so on.” Tosh also mentions that “the idea of manliness exercised a powerful hold over the Victorians,” what is more, “[o]ne strand treats manliness as the special province of the public schools, with headmasters cast in the role of expert.” [...] But manliness was more than a subject of learned disputation, more even than an educational tool; it was a guide to life, deeply rooted in popular culture, and often resistant to the redefinitions proposed by didactic writer” (“Gentlemanly Politeness” 459).

Mrs Gradgrind, a little, thin, white, pink-eyed bundle of shawls, of surpassing feebleness, mental and bodily; who was always taking physic without any effect, and who, whenever she showed a symptom of coming to life, was invariably stunned by some weighty piece of fact tumbling on her; [...]. Mrs Gradgrind, weakly smiling, and giving no other sign of vitality, looked (as she always did) like an indifferently executed transparency of a small female figure, without enough light behind it. (*Hard Times* 13, 14)

The loss or absence of the mother, as I argued in the Introduction, is a general feature of Dickens's father-daughter plots, although its function differs from novel to novel. In *Hard Times*, the absence of the mother—a figure of *domestic* authority in Victorian Britain—is yet another sign of the not only paternal and patriarchal but also markedly maculine nature of the Coketown dystopia. Without the mother, even the decisions that would normally be made, at least partly, by the mother come entirely under the father's authority. If Mr Dombey mistakes his home for a business company, Mr Gradgrind seems to think that his house is a school.

The mother's depersonalized, repressed, and depressed existence forces her children to rely partly on themselves when encountering domestic conflicts, and partly, oddly enough, on their father, since only Mr Gradgrind can manage more or less adequately the domestic issues of the household, at least, until Sissy Jupe enters the Gradgrind establishment. Mrs Gradgrind's insignificance can be approached from various aspects. Her failure as a "successful domestic economist" is the primary reason for her husband's "[mal]formation of male subjectivity," because without the "proper maintenance of the home, [...] the Englishman's identity is incomplete" (Waters 19).⁴⁷ It is important, however, to see that

⁴⁷ *The Ladies' Cabinet* of 1844 highlights the attributes of a successful housewife: "Enter the humblest dwelling under the prudent management of a discreet and rightly educated female, and observe the simplicity and good taste which pervade it. [...] Her house is the abode and token of neatness and thrift; of good order and cleanliness" (qtd. in Waters 20), that is, basically everything opposed to the Gradgrind house.

Catherine Waters refers to the archaic meaning of the word ‘economist’ (a ‘thrifty person’) as opposed to the newer, tacitly accepted meaning of ‘statistician’ by Thomas Gradgrind (*Hard Times* 77). Either way, from the (patho)logical father’s viewpoint, his wife cannot reach the sophisticated level of (utilitarian) domesticity since, according to his ethos, even the biblical, self-sacrificial “Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist” (168).

When, in her book on the mother figure from Dickens to Freud, Carolyn Dever talks about the objectification of the mother in Victorian fiction, she, the mother, “rarely speaks, and she seldom has a name but it objectifies her as and through her body” (16). According to Dever “[t]he issue at stake in fiction is not motherhood for the sake of the mother, but motherhood for the sake of its emotional impact on those around her, particularly the bereaved children and husband, forced to struggle on after her death without her as their reliable moral compass” (18-19). Mrs Gradgrind’s role as a possible “moral compass” is carefully hidden in the text when Louisa, because of her mother’s imminent death, visits her and talks to her.

On being told that Mr Bounderby was there, she replied [...] that she had never called him by that name since he married Louisa; that pending her choice of an objectionable name, she had called him J; and that she could not at present depart from that regulation [...].

“I want to hear of you, mother; [...].”

“You want to hear of me, my dear? That’s something new, I am sure, when anybody wants to hear of me. [...].”

“Are you in pain, dear mother?”

“I think there’s a pain somewhere in the room,” said Mrs Gradgrind, “but I couldn’t positively say that I have got it.” (*Hard Times* 155-56)

The episode reveals a perhaps unexpected sharpness and awareness in the mother, who seems to be, first, wilyly parodying her husband's methodical ways, then, quietly subverting his reign by referring to a pain (her daughter's and her own) that cannot be located, that is, the pain is something that evades Mr Gradgrind's authority. Her reference to Bounderby through a single letter, echoing Samuel Richardson's treatment of Pamela's violent suitor, Mr B., whose dubious morality relegates him to a sheer initial, subtly expresses verdict on the Bounderby-Gradgrind matrimony. She subjects Josiah Bounderby, the father's philosophical ally, to a kind of depersonalization not unlike her own. Mrs Gradgrind succinctly elucidates the root of all domestic problems in the Gradgrind household when she calls attention to her symbolic non-existence, and to the issue that, in fact, not only their house but the whole town is infected with the father's distorted world view.

However, the main reason the mother wishes to converse with her elder daughter has to do with something much more profound, which affects the rest of the children as well, and must be told to Louisa so that she should not commit the same series of domestic errors as her mother:

“You learnt a great deal, Louisa, and so did your brother. Ologies of all kinds from morning to night. If there is any Ology left, of any description, that has not been worn to rags in this house, all I can say is, I hope I shall never hear its name.” [...] “But there is something—not an Ology at all—that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don't know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it. I shall never get its name now. But your father may. It makes me restless. I want to write to him, to find out for God's sake, what it is.” (*Hard Times* 157)

The missed or forgotten value the mother is trying to define is Fancy (with a capital 'F'), whose cultural presence, it is stipulated in the school scene at the beginning of the book, must be annihilated: "You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact" (*Hard Times* 7). The institutional eradication of fancy leads to the emotionally deprived life of the Gradgrinds, especially as their house also functions as an unfathomable source of education, where the same paternal principles are inculcated as in the Gradgrind model school. The efficiency of the father's method is indicated not only by the fact that the mother has forgotten the name of the key to a more complete human life, but also by her inability to imagine anything that is not an "Ology", that would be outside the paternal Logos.

The mother realizes the need for something in excess of the world of Ologies too late to create an "apprentice" out of her daughter with whom she could achieve their mutual "lifework [...] of placating, pleasing, soliciting, and editing the patriarch" as is the case in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1869) (Zwinger, *Daughters* 64). The relationship between mother and daughter is difficult to conceive in terms of accepted plot types anyway. Patrilineal genealogy "inserts a designated 'son,' asserts the fiction of his superior relatedness to the father, and thereby aligns daughters legally with their mothers as irrelevant to patrilineality. Daughters thus become stabilized, fixed as objects, by operation of law; their filial connection to the mother is disqualified as descent [...]" (136).

Until young Thomas Gradgrind becomes a thief, Mr Gradgrind thinks of him as his own only possible successor concerning domestic ideology. In this genealogical logic, the placeless daughter "oscillates between subject (the father's heir) and object (the father's property)" (136), thus, her story is unrelated to the mother. The daughter's enforced alignment to her mother is not shaken primarily by the death of her mother, but by the moral downfall (Tom Gradgrind in *Hard Times*), biological death (Little Paul in *Dombey and Son*), or

emblematic absence (Frederick Trent in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Edward Dorrit in *Little Dorrit*) of the son, who in this way creates a domestic vacuum which can only be filled with the daughter. Thus the daughter can become unfixed, even her subject-object oscillation may disappear due to a strong filial affection for the father who allows her to approach his domestic position within and outside of the household—especially in times of such crises as Tom’s hiding in and escape from Mr Sleary’s Circus (*Hard Times* Bk. 3, Ch. 7 and 8).

However, Mrs Gradgrind’s death has a transformative effect as for her daughters “[s]eparation is [...] [the] chance to become subjects of representation. But becoming a subject of representation means casting out [...] the mother” (Jacobus 178). The father’s latent fear is that Louisa becomes too strong a subject, thereby drawing attention to the possible inability of all the Gradgrind men to fulfill their required, future dominant role in the symbolic order. The reason behind his intention to exert an exaggerated control over each female representative of his family, in fact over every female figure in the book, is that “the masculine, apparently victorious, confesses through its very relentlessness against the other, the feminine, that it is threatened by an asymmetrical, irrational, wily, uncontrollable power” (Kristeva 70).⁴⁸ And this feminine, uncontrollable power, embodied by Louisa, which in time becomes unacceptably irrational from Thomas Gradgrind’s angle, is already gaining momentum during a crucial dialogue between the father and the daughter pertaining to Louisa’s (externally enforced) choice of a husband.

It is probably Mr Gradgrind’s unadmitted fear of feminine antagonism that makes him start this important conversation with his model daughter by reminding her that she is only a pre-programmed cogwheel in the Gradgrind domestic machinery, which has to keep on functioning exactly the same way as it has always been—in compliance with the father’s will—otherwise, the whole scientifically constructed Gradgrind domesticity might fall apart,

⁴⁸ Kristeva earlier writes on “giving men rights over women,” referring to “[t]he latter, apparently put in the position of passive objects, [who] are none the less felt to be wily powers, ‘baleful schemers’ from whom rightful beneficiaries must protect themselves” (70).

causing the father to lose his power—which, in fact, happens later, oddly enough due to young Tom Gradgrind’s social nonconformity:

“My dear Louisa,” said her father, “[...] [y]ou have been so well trained, and you do, I am happy to say, so much justice to the education you have received, that I have perfect confidence in your good sense. You are not impulsive, you are not romantic, you are accustomed to view everything from the strong dispassionate ground of reason and calculation. From that ground alone, I know you will view and consider what I am going to communicate.” (*Hard Times* 75)

The daughter, as the end product of the father’s ethos, is thought to be the true image of the male parent, but not of the mother (Mrs Gradgrind, among other things, can never fulfill her educational role in the Gradgrind domestic scheme, which Louisa, in turn, can, toward Sissy Jupe [45]). Still, as a potentially subversive family member, she must be metaphorically reset—even if it were not necessary—to remain well within the feminine demarcation line of the symbolic order.

For all his kindness, the father’s preamble reflects the exclusion of femininity from the symbolic world as described by Clément and Kristeva: “[M]asculine, and extremely technological, fundamentalism excludes women” (19).⁴⁹ When the father defines Louisa by enumerating her features, what he denies are precisely the features traditionally known as feminine. In this passage, Louisa is a person who is a woman in terms of biology (that is why she is going to be traded in the marriage market) but masculine in everything else. Her father instructs her about her expected future role in matrimonial life, thereby inadvertently asserting the “Victorian terms,” according to which “middle-class marriage sometimes looked like an

⁴⁹ Although Clément and Kristeva by the word ‘fundamentalism’ refer to strong, religious or political, dogmatic social stances (19, 97, 156, 163, 166, 178), the term can also be used for the Gradgrind economic philosophy, since it is elaborated and guarded by Mr Gradgrind with an almost religious zeal.

arrangement that exchanged one valuable commodity, a woman's sexual inexperience, for another, a man's agreement to confine his sexual urges to a single partner to whom he was legally bound" (Nelson 20).⁵⁰ Louisa's reaction is unexpected:

He waited, as if he would have been glad that she said something. But she said never a word.

"Louisa, my dear, you are the subject of a proposal of marriage that has been made to me."

Again he waited, and again she answered not one word. This so far surprised him, as to induce him gently to repeat, "a proposal of marriage, my dear." To which she returned, without any visible emotion whatever:

"I hear you, father. I am attending, I assure you."

"Well!" said Mr Gradgrind, breaking into a smile, after being for the moment at a loss, "you are even more dispassionate than I expected, Louisa." (*Hard Times* 75-76)

Louisa's silence is more subversive than a loud antagonism would be: although, on the one hand, it is the auditive counterpart of her symbolic invisibility, the silence of subjection, but, on the other hand, it is also her only weapon in this conversation. If language (the symbolic, Logos, the world of Ologies) is patriarchal, the only way she can register her resistance is by refusing to enter it. Her absence from the patriarchal discourse is, in fact, a kind of presence that eludes the control Mr Gradgrind, who is duly baffled, even though he might have expected vocal resistance, at least for two reasons.

⁵⁰ Claudia Nelson, at the same time, notes that "while selecting a wife for her immaturity and naiveté could lead to ill-assorted unions, as in Emily Eden's novel *The Semi-Attached Couple* (published 1860, though written in the early 1830s), [...] the girl-wife's presumptive innocence might nonetheless be viewed as a guarantee of her worth" (20). Louisa Gradgrind's worth, however, is proved only to her father at the end of the novel, but fails to be proved to her husband as well.

First, he himself also knows that his daughter is now relegated to be a mere commodity of Coketown culture—thanks to *him*, his power to rearrange human (power) relations in the symbolic order; thus, his daughter, forced into a marriage with Josiah Bounderby, may feel betrayed by him. Second, in his wish to see at least the *façade* of a well-functioning family maintained, the father needs the illusion of an intimate dialogue, instead of this awkward monologue.

Nevertheless, Mr Gradgrind wilfully mistakes his daughter's (self-)victimization for dispassionateness which is, in fact, regarded by him as a fundamental virtue. His didactic approach to his daughter in the compelling issue of matrimony is rooted in eighteenth-century patriarchal discourse, in which the *paterfamilias* manifests

growing attentions to the education of his children [which] constituted the *preservation* of patriarchal prerogative, albeit in a more benevolent guise. [...] [P]aternal tutelage more often involved inculcation into a particular *stance* to be taken in relationship to the father's authority than it did any particular *subject matter*. By educating his dependents into the ways of deference and obedience [...] the patriarch assured his own paternal authority while establishing familial loyalties among members. Most important, this process was most often implemented without any visible coercive power. (Kowaleski-Wallace 17, italics in the original)

It is not in the interest of Thomas Gradgrind to alienate his daughter from himself (the main reason for avoiding “visible coercive power”), especially as he believes to observe all the scientific virtues missing from his wife in Louisa. As there can be no question about his paternal authority, what he does with systematic precision is careful, benevolently disguised

“educating his dependents into the ways of deference and obedience” (Kowaleski-Wallace 17), thereby resolving what Fliegelman calls the great challenge of patriarchal politics, familial and national, which was

to make authority and liberty compatible, to find a surer ground for obligation and obedience than ‘the fear of the rod,’ ” [because] imperiousness and severity create in men a slavish temper and a dissembled obedience that awaits but the right moment to throw off all restraint, [that is why] force must be replaced by reasonableness, the imposition of absolute will with the creation of shared values. (14).

As mentioned before, Louisa in her father’s eye is the ultimate, positive end product of his own philosophy; however, the daughter’s passive and silent acquiescence feeds his self-deception. Thomas Gradgrind lives under the delusion that his angelic daughter shares, obviously has always shared, every paternal value in their domestic life, therefore, she is ready to move into the domestic sphere of the other main ideologist of Coketown ethos, Josiah Bounderby.⁵¹

However, before accepting Bounderby’s marriage proposal, Louisa asks several embarrassing questions which threaten to unbalance her father. Her key questions are the following: “Father,” said Louisa, “do you *think* I love Mr Bounderby?” [...] “Father,” pursued Louisa in exactly the same voice as before, “do you *ask* me to love Mr Bounderby?” [...] “Father,” she still pursued, “does Mr Bounderby *ask* me to love him?” [...] (*Hard Times* 76,

⁵¹ From Thomas Gradgrind and Josiah Bounderby’s viewpoint, Louisa can only become an ideal wife if she willingly accepts her submissive domestic role acknowledging blindly the authoritarian precept, similarly to Roger Scatcherd’s wife, that “the province of a woman is to obey” (Trollope, *Dr. Thorne* [1858] 104), simply because “absolute headship and perfect mastery [...] should belong to the husband as husband” (Trollope, *Rachel Ray* [1863] 326). This autocratic male prerogative echoes the maxim according to which “[h]uman beings [...] seldom deny themselves the pleasure of exercising a power which they are conscious of possessing, even though that power consists only in a capacity to make others wretched” (Brontë, *The Professor* [1857] 96).

italics added). Instead of asking the simplest and most relevant question by way of an answer (e.g., ‘What do you think, my dear Louisa?’), Thomas Gradgrind offers two parallel sets of answers. What he says is the opposite of what he feels and since he is unable to conceal his opinion about the Gradgrind-Bounderby matrimony, Louisa sees his father’s evident confusion. The narratorial exposure unveils the father’s weakness, anticipating the future collapse of the Gradgrind family ethos: “Strange to relate, Mr Gradgrind was not so collected at this moment as his daughter was. He took a paper-knife in his hand, turned it over, laid it down, took it up again, and even then had to look along the blade of it, considering how to go on. [...] Mr Gradgrind was extremely discomfited [...]. Mr Gradgrind seemed rather at a loss [...]” (*Hard Times* 76, 79). To emphasize the father’s internal split, the narrator depicts Mr Gradgrind’s psychic state by merging both characters’ bodily expressions (the surface of the conversation), and the father’s mental processes into a single textual unit:

From the beginning, she had sat looking at him fixedly. As he now leaned back in his chair, and bent his deep-set eyes upon her in his turn, perhaps he might have seen one wavering moment in her, when she was impelled to throw herself upon his breast, and give him the pent-up confidences of her heart. But, to see it, he must have overleaped at a bound the artificial barriers he had for many years been erecting [...]. The barriers were too many and too high for such a leap. [...] [A]nd the moment shot away into the plumbless depths of the past, to mingle with all the lost opportunities that are drowned there. (78)

The point is not whether Louisa wishes to remove the paternal barriers, but the fact that her father can and will imagine this event, that is, Thomas Gradgrind himself act as the counterpoint of his own anti-imagination campaign. Dickens’s melodramatic images here

suggest in advance the, yet again imaginable, tragic outcome of the future matrimony—through evoking what Peter Brooks calls “the expressionism of the moral imagination” (55).⁵² Oddly enough, this kind of imagination helps the father, unconsciously, to survive in the mechanistic industrial culture whose economic system is based exclusively on black-and-white statistical data, and whose originator is Thomas Gradgrind himself.

Unlike Paul Dombey who does not plan to maintain his patriarchy with the help of his daughter, not even after his son’s death, Thomas Gradgrind clearly sees that the future of his scientific patriarchal system can never be passed on to the next generation without the active presence and co-operation of Louisa, especially as his son, young Thomas, is figuratively dead to him. As the other male children are barely mentioned (even their exact age is hidden), it is Louisa who takes centre stage in the father’s eyes—but not in the eyes of her brother Tom, who relentlessly abuses his barely acknowledged domestic position to the detriment of his sister.

Tom is depicted as the ultimate malformation of the Gradgrind system, whose primary function is to offset the father-daughter dyad’s dominant presence in the main plot by undermining the fragile father-daughter relationship in making Louisa the victimized accomplice to his bank robbery (*Hard Times* 206, 217), thereby shattering the image of a morally superior daughter in the father’s mind. Young Tom is the embodiment of parental failure, who will never be able to fulfill the paternal role in the symbolic order:

It was very remarkable that a young gentleman who had been brought up under one continuous system of unnatural restraint, should be a hypocrite; but it was certainly the case with Tom. It was very strange that a young gentleman who

⁵² Brooks highlights the significance of gestures in expressing individual morality, stating that “[m]any of the most highly charged meanings in the works of Dickens [...] come to us through gesture, are postulated as being expressed through gesture. The most significant of these gestures do not derive their charge of meaning from a social code [...] but are essentially metaphoric, punctuating the text with silent indicators invoking the presence of a moral occult” (75).

had never been left to his own guidance for five consecutive minutes, should be incapable at last of governing himself; but so it was with Tom. It was altogether unaccountable that a young gentleman whose imagination had been strangled in his cradle, should be still inconvenienced by its ghost in the form of grovelling sensualities; but such a monster, beyond all doubt, was Tom. (*Hard Times* 105)

The gentleman-hypocrite-monster sequence is an accurate rendering of Tom, although the quotation above speaks as much about his father, indirectly referring to his monstrously mechanistic domestic regime, as about Tom himself. Tom deliberately distorts his father's economic tenets so that they can serve his ignoble interests under any circumstances. The mainspring of his every action is greed, while the ultimate aim of his actions is threefold: (i) Proving to his father the untenability of his model education, (ii) causing financial damage to Josiah Bounderby, and (iii) bringing about his sister Louisa's moral defeat.

Anne Humpherys, comparing Tom with his sister Louisa, writes that they "share the same education and [...] are damaged emotionally by it, but they develop differently" (393). Tom clearly manifests "the corrosive effect of the Gradgrind system of education [...]. [He] becomes a slave to instant [financial] gratification," whereas Louisa "demonstrates [...] a contradiction to the scheme. Like *Oliver Twist*, despite everything that has happened to her, she has an incorruptible core of generosity and love. (393)⁵³ It is precisely his sister's unconditional love proved by her ever generous assistance that young Tom aims to take advantage of, especially when he wants her to get money from Bounderby. What is more, Tom declares with egotistic irony that Louisa, in fact, "didn't marry old Bounderby for her

⁵³ In connection with this comparison, Humpherys argues that "[t]his core of goodness, however, by being untouched by anything in her education or environment, partially qualifies the novel's attack on the industrial/utilitarian complex, even as Oliver's innate and unchanging goodness undermines the attack on the workhouse system" (394).

own sake, or for his sake, but for [...] [Tom's] sake" (*Hard Times* 139). Tom and Louisa, in fact, can be looked upon as *fraternal* (cultural) twins, the unbreakable umbilical cord between them is their father's ethos, which, however, does not operate the same way in their thoughts or actions as in the case of their father.

To define the difference between the two characters, Katherine Kearns points out that "Gradgrindism's repression of every available outlet for the play of fantasy—the not-real—generates within the story the extremisms of both Tom's debauchery and Louisa's blank depression" (858). Kearns refers to young Tom's eventual, degenerate transformation as "madness," while Louisa's disorder is identified by her as mere "nihilism" (858).⁵⁴ No wonder then that a final escape from this paternal mechanism as domesticity cannot, or rather, can only partially originate from Louisa and, to a far smaller extent, from Tom. Thus, an additional daughter figure, Sissy Jupe, is introduced into the main plot to help Louisa save her father from *himself*, at the same time, a disturbing son figure, Bitzer, is also introduced only to confront Mr Gradgrind with his own disastrous philosophy of life.

Sissy Jupe, a deserted daughter, acts both as a mother figure and a daughter figure in the framework of the Gradgrind domesticity; her very presence in the family affairs signifies obvious inadequacies in the parental domestic management and educational system.⁵⁵ "Men may be competent or even talented homemakers, but if miracles are to be performed, a woman is required," claims Frances Armstrong, partly because "for most men home is only one of their areas of activity, and not particularly a target for [...] improvement. They do not feel the need to remedy its shortcomings as urgently as women do," perhaps because "a woman's sense of self is bound up with her home, but a man can find fulfilment elsewhere"

⁵⁴ Kearns states that "Louisa's vacancy is the profoundest emptiness, the nihilism of one who cannot even *imagine* the alternatives to nothingness and who has no terms for the nothingness she feels. [...] In a fiction that operates at one level with ferocious, journalistic realism she is the void at the hard edges of material realities" (873, italics in the original).

⁵⁵ It is Sissy who saves Louisa from the disastrous scheme of James Harthouse, even persuading the latter to leave the neighborhood in reparation for his bad influence on her (*Hard Times* 180-84). Furthermore, it is Sissy who sends Tom to Mr Sleary, proprietor of a circus, to hide there, thereby avoiding the apprehension on account of the Bounderby bank robbery (216).

(Frances Armstrong 71). Therefore, it is evident by the end of the novel that Sissy is fundamentally the only female character who can creditably assert her domestic competence in any crucial moment.

The role of the symbolic son figure, Bitzer, is much more controversial—even for Thomas Gradgrind. Until the end, he always appears as the express image of the Gradgrind philosophical system. He is accurate, possessing lexical knowledge which he is always ready to use, and relentless in his efforts to maintain the impersonal nature of scientificity penetrating nearly every segment of Coketown life. It is tempting to look upon him merely as a contrast to Tom; however, without Bitzer's inculcated ambition to rise in the Coketown social/cultural hierarchy, Tom would probably not have left his family, that is, he (Tom) would have remained in the long run under paternal influence and in a state of economic dependence. The ultimate verbal clash between Thomas Gradgrind (the father-as-theory) and Bitzer (the son-as-practice) takes place when Bitzer tries to prevent Tom from escaping the punishment of criminal law:

Bitzer, still holding the paralysed culprit by the collar, stood in the Ring, blinking at his old patron through the darkness of the twilight.

"Bitzer," said Mr Gradgrind, broken down, and miserably submissive to him, "have you a heart?"

"The circulation, sir," returned Bitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question, "couldn't be carried on without one. No man, sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart."

"Is it accessible," cried Mr Gradgrind, "to any compassionate influence?"

“It is accessible to Reason, sir,” returned the excellent young man. “And to nothing else.” (*Hard Times* 225)

It is important to see here that Bitzer is not meant to be sarcastic to the detriment of his former master. He, unlike Tom, simply manages to apply the knowledge accumulated in his mind, since he was first exposed to the Gradgrind school system. More important, this is the moment in the main plot when the father, at last, completely understands the untenability of his scientific ethos as to its applicability for human relationships, but he is no longer able to change, or at least alter, the all-pervading patriarchal system causing the ruin of his house.

At the end of *Hard Times*, neither Louisa, nor Tom, nor Bitzer experiences symbolic redemption within the philosophical system from which they all have suffered. The foster daughter Sissy, however, survives Gradgrindism and persuades her foster father—in the wake of Louisa—of the significance of emotions in human relations. In this way, the two daughter figures mutually pave the way toward a possible, future symbolic order, in which the patriarch may even admit and accept the redemptive force of his daughter. This is what can be observed in the vicissitudinous relationship between Nell Trent and her (grand)father, in the *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Part 2. Emotionally Unstable Fathers and Devoted Daughters

Chapter 3. Household Gods: Domesticity and the Father-Daughter Plot in

The Old Curiosity Shop

And though home is [only] a name, a word, it is a strong one; stronger than magician ever spoke, or spirit answered to, in strongest conjuration.

(Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* 469)

The Old Curiosity Shop, this picaresque novel, the earliest among the Dickens novels examined in the present dissertation, is the most iconoclastic in terms of subversive father-daughter dyads. The novel is an investigation of the crisis in Victorian domestic ideology, placing an atypical, symbolic father-daughter relationship in its main plot, which is elaborated in a figurative context drawing upon gothic and theological discourses. The novel is subversive not simply because the daughter is more competent than the father—this is the case in most Dickensian scenarios—but because the grandfather acknowledges this fact: “It is true that in many respects I am the child, and she the grown person,” (16) confesses the father figure early in the novel.⁵⁶

The ‘curiosity’ of *The Old Curiosity Shop* is, on the one hand, the total absence of the biological father (not even his name is mentioned in the novel); on the other hand, the presence of the *maternal* grandfather as an incompetent father surrogate (oddly enough, unnamed as well), who tries to bolster a financially crumbling household, in which his

⁵⁶ A strong British empire requires strong men both in their public life and at home, too: “Male headship of the family home, that microcosm of the social and political order, was a key factor in nineteenth-century masculine status. Through interpreting the roles of husband and father in terms of the authoritative, benevolent patriarch [...] the clerical elite divinized temporal fatherhood.” For instance, “Anglican readings of marital sexual relations [...] elevated the spiritual significance of fleshly bodies while reinforcing the socio-spiritual power and privilege of the *paterfamilias*” (Bradstock et al. 185-86). In Amelia Opie’s *The Father and Daughter*, Mr Fitzhenry; in Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* (1849) Mr Bloomfield; in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, Mr Tulliver; in Anthony Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now*, Augustus Melmotte; or in Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard all emphasize this paternal domestic supremacy, which gives rise to the belief that a strong father must be the inevitable prerequisite of a strong household.

granddaughter (Nell Trent⁵⁷) is growing up, to create for her a socially acceptable and economically sustainable domestic environment. Although she is a granddaughter and at the same time a sister (to Frederick Trent), every social circumstance forces Nell to act like a precocious adult daughter to her grandfather who denies the very existence of her brother, who in fact is the direct link to her parents, to her father, the unknown son-in-law of the grandfather.⁵⁸

The main argument of this chapter is that, irrespective of the cultural assumptions concerning family ties, the granddaughter figure can, must, and will assume the position and function of a daughter in order to save and maintain the image of an idealized Victorian nuclear family and domesticity. Although the two principal characters of the novel are repeatedly surrounded by different, more or less sustainable, domestic settings and figures (which can be seen as material projections of the grandfather's disturbed and disturbing inner self), they are unable to create their own domestic harmony, since the ever changing domestic settings influence *them* as negatively as *they* themselves influence the places they inhabit. What they create instead of domestic harmony is an ongoing, interdependent struggle clearly seen in their unceasing (sometimes frantic) moving on as a kind of escape from any potentially domestic space—which in the end culminates in the utter failure and death of the symbolic father figure and the daughter figure alike.

The gothic backdrop of the book, manifested in murky topographic references as well as a series of gothic settings and characters, very early draws attention to the contrast, even conflict, between two possible realities: domesticity (on earth) vs. homelessness-as-

⁵⁷ Dickens's naming-as-reference method manifests itself in a peculiar way if we compare little Nell to Little Dorrit. While Nell, always "an arrow pointing to representational values that are always somewhere above and beyond the text" (Zemka 298) is burdened with a quasi-attached diminutive adjective ('little' with a small 'l'), Amy possesses the word 'Little' (with a capital 'L') as her substitute name, albeit it is she herself whose presence in the plotline, despite this magnified diminutive which is to regularly degrade her economically effective actions and words, can save her father in the Dorrit family's (individual) symbolic order.

⁵⁸ The narratorial silence about the identity of the biological father draws attention—with a Dickensian twist—to the Latin legal axiom "whereby the identity of the father is always open to doubt—*pater semper incertus est*" (Bowlby 131); it remains doubtful in the novel who should be regarded as Nell's real father, since, beside the absence of her biological father, her (grand)father is unable to fulfill the vacant symbolic role.

domesticity (a kind of movement toward an eternal abode). As Andrew McCann points out, the “connection between death and the eternal is [...] central to the [...] topography of ruins and graves that figures so prominently in the novel” (177). He later adds that “Dickens’s ruins in *The Old Curiosity Shop* [...] gesture toward a theology of redemption, but they also store in them the movement of history” (183). This historical movement, however, is the mainspring not only of theological redemption but cultural and biological salvation, too, which is reached only at the end of the book.

The previously mentioned two conflicting world structures as conflicting realities are represented both by tangible physical spaces and by the unusual appearance of the characters themselves. When the narrator, the single gentleman, first meets Nell and then enters the antiques shop, which serves for both the father surrogate and the daughter surrogate as an illusory anchor of domestic life, her incongruousness in the oppressive domestic interior cannot escape his attention. The shop “was one of those receptacles [...] to hide their musty treasures from the public eye.” There can be seen in it “suits of mail standing like ghosts in armour [...], rusty weapons [...], distorted figures in china and wood and iron and ivory: tapestry and strange furniture” (*Curiosity Shop* 12). The medieval atmosphere suggests as if life (Nell) had become irreparably attached to death (i.e., to the shop as a scenario of death with its weird *entérieur* and its no less weird owner, her grandfather). However, despite this attachment, Nell, the allegorical image of life, must necessarily represent the opposite of her grandfather, the allegorical image of death—otherwise, their shared domestic ‘life’ cannot undergo significant changes.

The narrator then comes to the “little old man” whose “haggard aspect [...] was wonderfully suited to the place; he might have groped among old churches and tombs and deserted houses and gathered all the spoils with his own hands. There was nothing in the whole collection but was in keeping with himself” (12). This old man trailing “among old

churches and tombs” (*Curiosity Shop* 12) may remind us of the (figuratively) homeless “madman from the cemetery” in the Bible, who literally “lived there among the tombs and graves” (*The Message*, Mark 5:2-3).⁵⁹ Nell’s grandfather, just like the socially condemned *pariah* in the Bible, is also homeless figuratively, especially as his shop (where, oddly enough, we never see buyers) as a *pro tempore* dwelling place cannot fill the vacuum which the lack of a warm household has created for him and his granddaughter.

The antiques shop, which exists to “hide” its “musty treasures” and its owner “from the public eye in jealousy and distrust,” (*Curiosity Shop* 12, italics added) is the memento and spatial embodiment of the (grand)father’s mentally and financially ruined life—a sort of an economic and cultural burial place where, instead of the initially imagined birth of the symbolic father, the father figure’s gradual disappearance becomes evident—creating out of the novel a “gravestone text, that monument to paternity whose precondition is the father’s death” (Beizer 181), in the case of Nell Trent, her biological as well as her symbolic father’s death.⁶⁰

The grandfather’s “jealousy” and “distrust” (*Curiosity Shop* 12) originate from the fear of the ever impending loss of the solace of his old age: Nell Trent, his “household saint” and “angel-woman” of the house (Gilbert and Gubar 25), whose “power [under ideal circumstances] is for rule, nor for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision” of domestic life (Ruskin 92). Yet, as we are reminded at the end of the novel, “in the severity of her selflessness, as well as in the extremity of her alienation from ordinary fleshly life, this nineteenth-century angel-woman

⁵⁹ The gothic image of the ghoul (i.e., a grave robber) can also be seen here as the embodiment of metropolitan gothic just like in Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* 194.

⁶⁰ The novel’s success seems to be somewhat contradictory to Roland Barthes’s statement concerning (good) fiction: “Death of the Father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures. If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Doesn’t every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn’t storytelling always a way of searching for one’s origin, speaking one’s conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred?” (47). Dickens, however, succeeds in overcoming this Barthian obstacle to the book’s success by killing off the daughter figure in such a melodramatic manner that the father figure’s death appears almost as a mere incident of minor importance.

becomes not just a memento of otherness but actually a *memento mori*” (Gilbert and Gubar 24). Thus, Nell’s innocent angelic figure is far from the ideal(ized) Ruskinian female figure especially as she is unable to create order in the household, mostly because she is relegated from the start to be merely a “pure, fresh, youthful object” who, nevertheless, cannot be catalogued by force as one of the “uncanny miscellany of external objects” of the shop (Duncan 217), being a flesh-and-blood character after all. However, Nell’s barely animate nature, explored by Ian Duncan, is apparent from the start. In her grandfather’s eye, she is only a piece of property who may occasionally run errands; in the eyes of Frederick Trent, Daniel Quilp (a money-lending villain, a demonic figure), and Richard Swiveller (Frederick’s friend), she is no more than the means (quoting Quilp: a “duck of diamonds” [*Curiosity Shop* 70]) to the imaginary fortune hoarded by her grandfather.

It is obvious from the start that neither the grandfather nor Nell is able to fulfill their respective symbolic roles; what is more, they often feel compelled to exchange roles for the sake of social and economic survival, which—as expressed by the grandfather in the quote at the beginning of the present chapter—inevitably results in the precociousness of the (grand)daughter and the infantilism of the (grand)father. Analyzing Dickensian parent-child relationships, Arthur Adrian claims that the grandfather and the granddaughter are used to illustrate “the parent-child inversion” (120), that is, “Little Nell, abnormally wise and devoted for her years, not only assumes the old man’s duties, but also tries to save him from his mania for gambling. [...] The normal roles of adult and child are further reversed as Nelly guides her grandfather in their wanderings across the countryside and provides his food and shelter with her meagre earnings” (120).⁶¹ However, in contrast to his epigrammatic statement, the

⁶¹ As Adrian points out, the parent-child inversion does not appear only in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, but a “host of parent-child inversions pervad[e] Dickens’s mature work, where careful plans conform to a central design” (120). Other novels having this particular narrative design are *Nicholas Nickleby* with motherless Madeline Bray and her selfish father Walter Bray, *David Copperfield* with caring Agnes Wickfield and her dependent father Mr Wickfield, *Great Expectations* with dutiful John Wemmick and his cheerful old father Mr Wemmick, *Little Dorrit* with mother surrogate Amy Dorrit and her infantile father William Dorrit, and *Our Mutual Friend* with

grandfather declares that “waking or sleeping, by night or day, in sickness or health, she [Nell] is the one object of [...] [his] care” (*Curiosity Shop* 16). This sentence could have also been uttered by Nell Trent, nevertheless, she would have meant something different by the word ‘care’.

Dickens uses the word ‘care’ sixty-nine times in the book, the majority of which is either a direct or an indirect reference to the weak grandfather. While in the grandfather’s interpretation ‘care’ means a serious, repeated investment in the interest of his granddaughter’s future, Elysium-like domesticity, a subjective approach to the idea of ‘tender care,’ (“[S]he is the one object of my care [...] but there is a great end to gain and that I keep before me” [16]), little Nell, with her sensibleness, can only understand the word as a flesh-and-blood old man (the embodiment of ‘gnawing care’) with the constraint of standing by him both physically and spiritually, guiding and guarding him as a mother would her child (Nell “would not leave the old man until she had kissed him in his bed [99]).

Again, an inverted parent-child situation is suggested here: “The old man was uneasy when he had lain down, and begged that Nell would come and sit at his bedside as she had done for so many nights. She hastened to him, and sat there till he slept” (99). Later, he is referred to as a “grey-haired child” of “utter irresolution and feebleness” (236). In this way, when Mrs Jarley, the owner of Jarley’s Wax Work, offers Nell a situation as a way of escape from her domestic plight, she simultaneously tries (although in vain) to make the grandfather understand the significance of self-care, the indication of responsible adulthood:

“Do you want a good situation for your grand-daughter, master? If you do, I can put her in the way of getting one. What do you say?”

Bella Wilfer (‘little mother’) and her childish father Reginald Wilfer, and even more in the relationship between Jenny Wren and her alcoholic father.

“I can’t leave her,” answered the old man. “We can’t separate. What would become of me without her?”

“I should have thought you were old enough to take care of yourself, if you ever will be,” retorted Mrs Jarley sharply.

“But he never will be,” said the child in an earnest whisper. (*Curiosity Shop* 156)

The novel at this point seems to prefigure Michel Foucault’s view on Victorian society, especially on its surreptitiously authoritative emblem, the male parent:

There are [...] societies in which private life is highly valued, in which it is carefully protected and organized, in which it forms the center of reference for behaviors and one of the principles of their valuation—this appears to be true of the bourgeois classes in the Western countries of the nineteenth century. But, for this very reason, individualism in such societies is weak and the relations of oneself to oneself are largely undeveloped. (43)

Foucault indirectly calls attention to the necessity of altering dysfunctional family life possibly by creating strong individuals in society—this, however, does not necessarily entail the emergence of a reordered family structure. He subsequently uses the concept of the “cultivation of the self,” by which he means that “the art of existence [...] is dominated by the principle that says one must ‘take care of oneself’ ” (43). The grandfather’s taking care of himself, however, must take place by mutual consent away from the initial domestic setting, because there the daughter figure cannot fulfill her *maternal* role which would be the price of a domesticity depicted by Ruskin as “the true nature of home [...] [which] is the place of

Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division,” adding further that “in so far as it is not this, it is not home: so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed [...] to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home” (qtd. in Cohen, *Professional Domesticity* 1). This is the reason why Nell Trent urges her grandfather to leave behind their initial home(lessness) for good, since the point of their quest for a new home is not only to find a suitable, permanent abode, but rather to get rid of the primary place of their domestic failure, which haunts them till the end of their journey.

After their surreptitious departure from the antiques shop, the way the (grand)father and his (grand)daughter walk reveals mutual interdependence (“The two pilgrims, often pressing each other’s hands, or exchanging a smile or cheerful look, pursued their way in silence” [*Curiosity Shop* 90].) as if two people were required to make one whole person or one person whole. The grandfather’s physical strength must be coupled with Nell’s mental faculty—as if, in another allegory, the old man were the body, while Nell the soul, thereby together creating a composite figure—so that the two characters might make us believe that they are able to fulfill (one day) their symbolic roles.

Still, it is much rather the daughter figure than the father figure who provides help for the other as for a direction in life. What Nell Trent does is summarized by Victorian moralist and historian Arthur Helps: “Consider how a wise father will act as regards interference. His anxiety will not be to drag his child along undeviatingly, in the wake of his own experience but rather, to endue him with that knowledge of the chart and compass [...] which will enable the child, himself, to steer safely over the great waters” (qtd. in Ingham 17). Patricia Ingham, by way of introducing Helps, reminds us of course that “paternalist discourse [in the nineteenth-century] was necessarily authoritarian, given that it related to a patriarchal family. It was based on the assumption that children/the lower classes needed parental control and

guidance as well as concern for their physical well-being” (Ingham 17). What seems to change in this case is not the patriarchal discourse of the father-daughter relationship, but the dispensation of symbolic roles between Nell and her grandfather for the sake of their future physical well-being, and for the preservation of the symbolic order.

Roaming the countryside together, Nell remembers “an old copy of [John Bunyan’s] the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, with strange plates, upon a shelf at home, over which she had often pored whole evenings [...]. As she looked back upon the place they had left, one part of it came strongly on her mind” (*Curiosity Shop* 92). The subsequent dialogue reveals how they both interpret their escape from the antiques shop (the metonymy of their past life or even death itself):

“Dear grandfather,” she said, “only that this place is prettier and a great deal better than the real one, if that in the book is like it, I feel as if we were both Christian, and laid down on this grass all the cares and troubles we brought with us; never to take them up again.” “No—never to return—never to return”—replied the old man, waving his hand towards the city. “Thou and I are free of it now, Nell. They shall never lure us back.” (92)

Influenced by Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) in their attempt to survive a hostile reality, Nell and her grandfather create an alternative mental world exclusively for themselves, in which they see the chance of turning a new leaf, leaving behind the wicked figure of Daniel Quilp (“an evil spirit” [*Curiosity Shop* 133]), whose presence always guarantees the subversion of domesticity wherever he appears.⁶²

⁶² Chesterton notes the following in connection with Quilp depicting him as an archetype of evil: “He desires to hurt people in the same hearty way that a good-natured man desires to help them. He likes to poison people with the same kind of clamorous camaraderie with which an honest man likes to stand them drink. [...] Quilp is precisely the devil of the Middle Ages” (143).

The quotation also reveals the symbolic unity of the grandfather and Nell mentioned above (“I feel as if we were both Christian” [*Curiosity Shop* 92]), that is, the idea of two people necessarily becoming one (competent) person to achieve domestic harmony, thereby constructing two halves of the allegorical figure of Bunyan’s Christian.

The quote also reintroduces the motif of ‘care’, as if it were some substantially inalienable part of their mutual life which has hitherto prevented them from leading a culturally acceptable and economically sustainable domestic life. Yet, whereas Nell looks upon ‘care(s)’ as a problem which incapacitates her grandfather from becoming the required symbolic father figure who would be able to guard his daughter against (gambling) fortune seekers (just like he himself) as potential destroyers of their future domestic harmony, the grandfather associates it merely with the place they try to flee from, seeing the solution to his habitual problem only in a dramatic changing of their place of abode.

The two pilgrims’ symbolic as well as topographic progress, however, is continually disturbed, that is, hindered by the grandfather’s latent mental disorder, which is hidden behind infantilism combined with occasional apathy:

He was patient, and quiet; often sat brooding, but not despondently, for a long space; was easily amused, even by a sun-beam on the wall or ceiling; made no complaint that the days were long, or the nights tedious; and appeared indeed to have lost all count of time [...]. He would sit, for hours together, with Nell’s small hand in his, playing with the fingers and stopping sometimes to smooth her hair or kiss her brow; and, when he saw that tears were glistening in her eyes, would look, amazed, about him for the cause, and forget his wonder even while he looked. (74)

Immediately after this passive spell, a seemingly active episode follows during which it is evident that their relationship could barely function—however invertedly it does—without Nell’s ever monitoring intent to integrate her grandfather into the virtually non-existent cultural context of their mutual life:

The child and he rode out; the old man propped up with pillows, and the child beside him. They were hand in hand as usual. The noise and motion in the streets fatigued his brain at first, but he was not surprised, or curious, or pleased, or irritated. He was asked if he remembered this, or that. “O yes,” he said, “quite well—why not?” Sometimes he turned his head, and looked, with earnest gaze and outstretched neck, after some stranger in the crowd, until he disappeared from sight; but, to the question why he did this, he answered not a word. (*Curiosity Shop* 74)

Both quotations suggest that, unless Nell plays the role of a self-appointed mother figure (to some extent like Amy Dorrit in *Little Dorrit*), the inefficient father figure beside her is irretrievably lost—not merely to Victorian society, the materialized cultural context of the symbolic order, but, much more importantly, to Nell herself, who by no means wants to act as a subversive agent in this paternalistic world. In fact, “her exquisite self-discipline may reinforce and not overturn domination,” writes Michelle Massé of the gothic heroine, adding that “the Gothic subversive knows and remembers that her quiet stillness and meekly lowered eyes are the route to escape for herself and others” (250-51).

In episodes like the above, Nell’s desire to salvage their own nuclear family as well as to work on their not-yet-reached domestic bliss is manifest. Their being “hand in hand as usual” indicates that the daughter figure’s presence is essential for the (grand)father to have a

chance to *enter* the symbolic order and *live* his paternal role in his (grand)daughter's life. Nevertheless, Nell and her grandfather's constrained, interpersonal, and interdependent relationship is diametrically opposed to the idea of nineteenth-century (middle-class) paternalism. Sonya Rose comments that "the family came to symbolize the harmony of mutual interests. However, familial harmony was believed to emanate from a sense of reciprocal obligation predicated on a hierarchy of power and a strict division of labor between women and men" (196). According to Rose,

The Victorian family was envisioned as a patriarchal formation in which the father, as head of the family, had responsibility for the welfare of wives and children and guided them with firm but caring authority. This elite image of family life, characterized by mutual obligation and a gender and age hierarchy, became a model for paternalist industrial management. (196)

The several complex preconditions enumerated by Rose are missing from the Nell-grandfather domesticity: "harmony of mutual interests," "sense of reciprocal obligation," "strict division of labor," "responsibility for the welfare of [...] children," "firm but caring authority," and the all-encompassing ground of the symbolic order: "gender and age hierarchy" (196). The absence of these traits from their domestic life creates the ever present imbalance which forces Nell to assume the leading position and function (a symbolic *materfamilias*: the 'mother' as well as the 'female head' of the family), until her (grand)father becomes paternally transformed, thereby allowing his (grand)daughter to become, for the first time in her life, nothing more than an ordinary daughter figure.

Although on the surface (by day) the grandfather acts from the start mostly like a helpless figure who is unable to make crucial decisions, under the surface (by night), his

(cultural and, increasingly, medical) schizophrenic attributes are overpowering him: his common sense is overruled, and his relationship with his (grand)daughter is undermined by gambling (the previously mentioned ‘serious’ investment of his life), which is, in fact, a “phantom that [has always] haunted and brooded his mind” (*Curiosity Shop* 58).

The grandfather wilfully mistakes his frantic urge to gamble for contemporary work ethic. John Tosh notes that “male responsibility for the family income led to the characteristically Victorian valorization of work as both moral duty and personal fulfillment.” Equally important, “in its most elevated form (as in the hugely popular writings of Thomas Carlyle) work ceased to be drudgery and became the path to self-making, a creative act conferring meaning on the work and identity on the worker” (“Masculinities” 332). The grandfather’s gambling habit is a hideous misunderstanding of the path of self-making. Consequently, as John Kucich remarks, “the greatest evil Nell flees is not Quilp but her grandfather’s dream of making her a lady” (62),⁶³ which dream necessitates a financial policy, in his own interpretation a hazardous get-rich-quick method, pointing unavoidably toward economic success that is not devoid of its specific dangers, especially when it is seen connected to its circumscribed London area:

[T]hey came upon the haunts of commerce and great traffic, where many people were resorting, and business was already rife. The old man looked about him with a startled and bewildered gaze, for these were places that he hoped to shun. He pressed his finger on his lip, and drew the child along by narrow courts and winding ways, nor did he seem at ease until they had left it far

⁶³ In this respect, both *Great Expectations* and Joseph Conrad’s *Almayer’s Folly* can be regarded as novelistic counterparts of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In *Great Expectations* both Pip and Estella become victims of, at first sight, benevolent human intentions aiming to create a gentleman and a gentlewoman respectively of them, without paying any attention to what, in fact, they need in life. In Conrad’s *Almayer’s Folly*, the father’s (Kaspar Almayer’s) mind is so much preoccupied with “vivid dreams of untold wealth” (69) exclusively for himself and his daughter Nina that the daughter at one point rather elopes with a—oddly enough rich—prince just to get rid of her monomaniacal father.

behind, often casting a backward look towards it, murmuring that *ruin and self-murder* were crouching in every street, and would follow if they scented them; and that they could not fly too fast. (*Curiosity Shop* 91, italics added)

It is not the narrator of the novel but the grandfather who expresses his anxieties in connection with an opulent business life in the financial quarter of London as if he had a lucid interval which would compel him to save both of them from such a future economic reality. Therefore, they “could not fly too fast” (91) from this quarter of the city, not to mention its larger context, the city itself.

In the course of time, the existence of his dual or split personality carefully hidden behind the grandfather’s ill-fitting public mask is gradually revealed.⁶⁴ Events unfolding in spaces like the public-house called the Valiant Soldier signal the deterioration of the relationship between Nell and her grandfather and the rift in their attitudes to life. When she and the old man realize the possibilities (a neutral approach to the chance of a better life on Nell’s part) or opportunities (a positive [?] ‘nothing ventured, nothing gained’ ideology on the grandfather’s part) of this subcultural gambling world, the psychological distance between them immediately reveals itself as a growing wedge of mental animus.

Nell has no choice but to maintain her caring maternal role, hoping to change the direction of the course of events as well as her grandfather’s mindset. Obviously, his infatuation as fixation, while creating a single-inmate mental prison, incapacitates the

⁶⁴ Barbara Lecker in “The Split Characters of Charles Dickens” (1979) calls attention to the duality of several characters of Dickens. She investigates primarily the double (public/professional vs. private) life of minor characters like Mr Morfin, an elderly bachelor head clerk from *Dombey and Son*; Mr Jaggars, a criminal lawyer, and John Wemmick, the confidential clerk of Mr Jaggars from *Great Expectations*. Similarly to them, most Dickensian characters vacillate between their public and private spheres, which leaves its indelible impression on their personality and their attitude to people around them. Lecker does not address another type of duality afflicting protagonists, something apparently deeply concealed in the mind of figures like William Dorrit from *Little Dorrit*, or Alexander Manette from *A Tale of Two cities*. These last two figures, along with Nell’s grandfather, due to their mental imbalance always mismanage their life, proving their professional incompetence, and eventually their domestic incapacity as masters of their house.

grandfather for ensuring his and his granddaughter's future—despite his reiterated claims. In Nell's eyes, his blind insistence on his gambling habit by no means legitimizes its practice.

Although initially the grandfather's uncontrolled gambling, the primary source of his mental disturbance, is a profound secret before Nell, she can very early “see the old man struck down beneath the pressure of some hidden grief, [...] mark his wavering and unsettled state,” therefore she is “agitated at times with a dreadful fear that his mind was wandering” (*Curiosity Shop* 57). Nell can “trace in his words and looks the dawning of despondent madness” (57), which culminates in the grandfather's repeatedly imagined state of imprisonment—a paranoid idea connected with the loss of his granddaughter: “They will shut me up in a stone room, dark and cold, and chain me up to the wall, Nell—flog me with whips, and never let me see thee more!” (116). In a later passage,

[h]is disordered imagination represented to him a crowd of persons stealing towards them beneath the cover of the bushes, lurking in every ditch, and peeping from the boughs of every rustling tree. He was haunted by apprehensions of being led captive to some gloomy place where he would be chained and scourged, and worse than all, where Nell could never come to see him, save through iron bars and gratings in the wall. (138)

It is madness manifesting itself in a grand delusion of persecution, in the mental suffering from imagined “stalking,” which “enlarg[es] on the flight of a victim through a misty chiaroscuro [...] over rough terrain” (Snodgrass 325). The old man's “disordered imagination” (*Curiosity Shop* 138) is already hinted at much earlier in the book, when we get an insight into Nell's own inner conflict:

[T]o watch and wait and listen for confirmation of these *things* day after day, and to feel and know that, come what might, they were alone in the world with no one to help or advise or care about them—these were causes of depression and anxiety that might have sat heavily on an older breast with many influences at work to cheer and gladden it, but how heavily on the mind of a young child to whom they were ever present, and who was constantly surrounded by all that could keep such thoughts in restless action! (*Curiosity Shop* 57-58, italics added)

Nell's "depression and anxiety" is nurtured by the domestic setting as much as by her grandfather, whose confused behavior is "a kind of secret history of what goes on beneath the veneer of culture" observed "in the Gothic paraphernalia of the 'curiosity shop' itself" (Punter and Byron 289, 290). Nell is like heroines—including Catherine Morland or Catherine Earnshaw—"at the threshold of the Gothic domain, [...] [who] tremble in fear of they know not what, feel unaccountable dread, go cold with a sense of unimaginable doom" (DeLamotte 205), from which both she and her (grand)father feel compelled to escape, since the antiques shop with its oppressive gothicness magnifies the grandfather's as well as Nell's, incongruousness in the surrounding city of London (the larger gothic *milieu* of the novel), which symbolically engulfs the shop in the same way as the shop, this "oneiric world of Gothic inner space" (205), engulfs Nell. The damaged or impossible domesticity created by the incompetent grandfather and Nell is embodied and expressed by the grotesque gothicness of the shop.

If Nell aims to create their domestic life by entirely assuming her daughter's role, she herself must establish the (pre)conditions of a functioning household, where her (grand)father is able to entirely assume his parental role. However, as the novel unfolds, it is becoming

evident that a potentially successful filial establishment of a sustainable household must be preceded by a successful paternal attempt to escape from, and get rid of, a schizophrenic attitude to his life.

Initially, the relations between Nell, her grandfather, and their primary domestic place are seemingly not discrepant. She can even feel happy; the narrator, reminiscing, mentions that “[s]he had gone singing through the dim rooms, and moving with gay and lightsome steps among their dusty treasures” (*Curiosity Shop* 58). The antiques shop, however, even at that time begins to repel the vitality emanating from Nell; gradually, it becomes a metaphorical crypt or coffin for symbolically dying people. The quotation above continues with these words: “making them older by her young life, and sterner and grim by her gay and cheerful presence” (58). It seems that the more animation is transmitted to the shop through Nell’s presence, the more it is transformed into decay. In other words, the more socially/culturally/economically functioning Nell wishes the antiques shop to become, the more antagonistic to her positive attitude to life the place turns out to be, thereby necessitating its inhabitants’ escape in the hope of finding a different, hospitable dwelling place—somewhere else, out of London.⁶⁵

Dickens, from the start, emphasizes the gothicness of spaces in the novel⁶⁶ functioning as paternal projections of domestic failure. The grandfather’s fragile existence is inscribed in the novel’s dismal and depressing spaces which tend to suggest, as Michael Sadleir remarks, “the triumph of chaos over order” (7). As long as they choose to remain permanently in one space (always the wish of the father), chaos prevails over possible order. Therefore, with the

⁶⁵ Nell Trent’s self-destructive relation to the shop may, to a degree, remind us of Honoré de Balzac’s novel, *La Peau de Chagrin* (1830) [*The Wild Ass’s Skin* or *The Magic Skin*], where the more ‘life’ the young protagonist Raphaël de Valentin tries to bring into his existence, the greater pace he approaches his own death due to the shrinkage of the wild ass’s skin. In the case of Nell, the antiques shop, this continually shrinking (continually disappearing) domestic living space is the entity which gradually shortens her life.

⁶⁶ Michael Slater writes that the gothic scenario “became a master-image or *leitmotif* for the full-length novel that was soon to take over the whole Master Humphrey project and prove to be crucial in the development of Dickens’s art.” Slater also mentions that *The Old Curiosity Shop* was first “strikingly printed in Gothic type” (*Dickens* 149).

gothic scenario, Dickens constantly reminds us of the importance of urgent change in the father-daughter relationship, which change, however, remains ineffective if it is exhausted only in altering the family's domestic settings. These settings, however, must undergo periodic alteration because "the narrative of the novel," comments Nóra Séllei in connection with Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, "is primarily in motion due to [...] [the heroine's] constraint to wander through those fictional spaces which are at her disposal. She must test her viability in them and against them" (52). Significantly, the novel's gothicity in subplots—a scenario as an impetus to move on—is the guarantee for Nell to act as an active, dynamic heroine of the novel, thereby showing another aspect of the book's subversion of the parent-child relationship and Victorian domestic ideology.⁶⁷

Even the allusions to decay coming from the house and its surrounding spaces keep Nell's mind preoccupied with the possible disruption of her two-member family: "[T]he chambers were cold and gloomy, and when she left her own little room [...] and sat in one of them, she was still and motionless as their inanimate occupants" (*Curiosity Shop* 58). This chiasmic pattern draws attention to Nell's behavior as a dead body anticipating her own or her grandfather's death, whereas the furniture appear as personified, but, at the same time, dead subjects. And when we see her sitting in one of the windows looking on to the street, we read that "at these times, mournful fancies came flocking on her mind, in crowds" because "[n]one are so anxious as those who watch and wait" (58). Nell is anxiously waiting for something or even on someone, as the allusion to the closing line of Milton's "On His Blindness" suggests,⁶⁸ for the time being, apparently helplessly for death—that is, for the total disruption

⁶⁷ Séllei calls attention to the marked difference between the gothic novels written by male and female writers. At the end of the novels written by men, the victimized heroine "either dies, or else the hero saves her in the last moment," whereas in the female gothic novels "the heroine is much more self-reliant and more importantly an initiator: she herself plays a significant part in her being saved from that situation, to which she may ultimately fall a victim" (71). However, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, neither the heroine herself nor any prospective heroes are able to save Nell Trent—as a result, the grandfather cannot be saved either.

⁶⁸ Cf., "They also serve who only stand and wait."

of her family, in it her own and/or her grandfather's death. Subsequently, the narrator reveals the cause behind her restless watching and waiting:

[W]atch[ing] the people [...] she would [...] perhaps see a man passing with a coffin on his back, and two or three others silently following him to a house where somebody lay dead; which made her shudder and think of such things until they suggested afresh the old man's altered face and manner, and a new train of fears and speculations. (*Curiosity Shop* 58)

Both Nell and her (grand)father worry about the future, mainly about losing the other. Nell's fear of death is projected entirely on her grandfather: the coffin-bearing man may symbolize the approaching end to disrupt the family by claiming the old man's life. She cannot and will not imagine her life without the nominal leader of their family, the substitute *paterfamilias*, whose initially symbolic, subsequently biological death is "the origin of [the] narrative," and his symbolic "absence," as well as the "absence" of the biological father, is "its foundation" (Beizer 41). Nell's negation of the substitute *paterfamilias*'s possible death is seen as her constant mental struggle, later on as a series of preventive actions to maintain at least the illusion of a socially acceptable family structure. However, while they lived in the shop, she was unable to disengage herself from the oppressive thoughts of death:

If he were to die—if sudden illness had happened to him, and he were never to come home again, alive—if, one night he should come home, and kiss and bless her as usual, and after she had gone to bed and fallen asleep and was perhaps dreaming pleasantly, and smiling in her sleep, he should kill himself, and his blood come creeping, creeping, on the ground to her own bed-room

door! These thoughts were too terrible to dwell upon, and again and again she would have recourse to the street, now trodden by fewer feet, and darker and more silent than before. (*Curiosity Shop* 58-59)

Little Nell feels an irrationally morbid guilt as if she were the cause of her grandfather's possible suicide. Its anticipations appear symbolically in the appearance of blood in her claustrophobic imagination. The imagined paternal blood is, at the same time, also a testimony to the social ineptitude of the father surrogate, because the grandfather is supposed to commit suicide as a consequence of an unsuccessful money-raking night that gradually becomes a proof in his and his granddaughter's eyes of his inability to fulfill his role in the symbolic order.

Nell's maddening thoughts compel her to "have recourse to the street" (59), that is, to go back frequently to the window of the antiques shop to seek mental freedom by looking out. The scene suggests that the shop is her prison, therefore, any sort of salvation can only be sought outside this domestic confinement. An important dialogue between her and her grandfather prepares the long series of salvation-seeking acts, the conscious changes in their domestic life to break away from their absurd, financially untenable circumstances. Little Nell begs her grandfather to share with her literally any other sort of domestic existence than the one they live in:

"Dear grandfather, let us leave this sad place to-morrow, and beg our way from door to door." The old man covered his face with his hands, and hid it in the pillow of the couch on which he lay. "Let us be beggars, [...]. Let us walk through country places, and sleep in fields and under trees, and never think of money again, or anything that can make you sad, but rest at nights, and have

the sun and wind upon our faces in the day, and thank God together! Let us never set foot in dark rooms or melancholy houses, any more, but wonder up and down wherever we like to go; and when you are tired you shall stop to rest in the pleasantest place that we can find, and I will go and beg for both.”⁶⁹
(*Curiosity Shop* 60)

The grandfather's silent reaction to Nell's suggestion may be interpreted outwardly as infantile ostrichism; covering his face and hiding it in a pillow is partly a rejection of Nell's desire for a radical domestic change (a chance to prove the [grand]father's symbolic power), partly persistence in *his* hitherto disastrous way of life or family ethos. Either way, little Nell's urge for a radical change in their domestic life is subversive in the novel's cultural context, positing the revelation of the father figure's inadequacy in the sight of everyone around them. This subversive movement is a transgression of the family's so far stationary domesticity. And as to gothic fiction, Avril Horner points out:

The heroine's attempts to escape [from the Gothic prison] indicate a desire to subvert a domestic ideology which was beginning to tyrannize the lives of middle-class women within a capitalist, newly-industrialized society; in such a society the bourgeois home was becoming uncomfortably like the castle or prison of the Gothic text in the way it constrained its female inhabitants. Actual children and women [...] are the archetypal victims of the Gothic

⁶⁹ Henry Mayhew also dealt with the problem of vagrancy. He observes that among the vagrant population of London we find mostly “youths, prostitutes, Irish families, and a few professional beggars. The youths formed more than one half of the entire number, and their ages were from twelve to twenty” adding further that “[t]heir great inclination is to be on the move, and wandering from place to place” (535). Mayhew depicts wandering young people and vagrant life in general mostly negatively, finding in them the future criminals of contemporary England. The way, however, Dickens depicts a vagrant life through Nell's words is rather positive, that is, appropriate to the taste of his reading public.

building and of its villainous master but they are also victimized by the middle-class residence. (Horner 116-17)

In this case, the “villainous master” is also his own victim, at least as much “victimized by the middle-class residence” as his own granddaughter. From his viewpoint, Nell’s transgressive suggestion is an instance of “[g]othic terror activat[ing] a sense of the unknown and project[ing] an uncontrollable and overwhelming power which threatens not only the loss of sanity, honour, property or social standing but the very order which supports and is regulated by the coherence of those terms” (Botting 5). In other words, the grandfather’s fear is not simply that of losing those few cultural-social values he has gained so far, but rather that of losing *everything* that makes him what he is.

Judging from the quotation, Nell sees their future existence differently, for her “[t]ransgressing the bounds of reality and possibility, [...] [is] challeng[ing] reason through their overindulgence in fanciful ideas and imaginative flights” (4), thereby “recasting the nature of social and domestic fears, [...] [the novel] presented different, more exciting, worlds in which [...] [Nell] in particular could encounter not only frightening violence but also adventurous freedom” (4). The “more exciting worlds” in questions are those transitional domestic settings that serve as dramatic stations on their way to the climax of the book—the end of their life.

Taking a chronological look at the dwelling places they come across—however temporary they seem—we are tempted to suppose that the grandfather and Nell, in fact, never leave behind their original, surrealistically gothic confinement. Put another way, each subsequent gothic space they look upon as, at least, a temporary place of abode haunts them by unavoidably reminding them either of their initial, gothic living place or of their grotesque lifestyle and attitude to life—as if by roaming they were destined to cause change in the

quality of their dwelling without inducing substantial change, thus only “houselessness” (homelessness) remain permanent in their life. Robert Newsom, alluding to Dickens’s biography, writes that from *Oliver Twist*, “Dickens’s concern with houses and houselessness reaches characteristic intensity and sharpness of focus” (104). In his discussion of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, he remarks that “it is of course Nell’s and her grandfather’s eviction from the shop and their subsequent travels that spring the novel’s central events” (104).

Newsom concludes that “the condition of being housed or not generally represents whether one knows who one is or not, and that in turn is dependent most often either on one’s relationship with one’s parents or, equally important, on their relationship with the world and with their own past” (104-05). Thus the domestic spaces to be explored here, as landmarks of their roaming, can also be regarded as stages for Nell and the grandfather to find (to discover) their own real selves, primarily in their specific relationship.

A laborer’s cottage: they enter the life of a large family here, but promptly feel compelled to move on, partly because they see themselves incongruous to the “tranquil air of comfort and content” (*Curiosity Shop* 95). Here normality functions as abnormality, because the grandfather meets an old man inside (the grandfather of this family—his benign double), and realizes the disturbing and intolerable contrast between himself and this positive fictional projection. The two grandfather figures are mutually exclusive entities in this circumscribed space of the symbolic order.

A roadside inn called The Jolly Sandboys: a place where the opposite situation obtains, abnormality functioning as normality. Here, the protagonists encounter dogs, each wearing a “coat of some gaudy colour [...] and one of them had a cap upon his head” (108); a “proprietor of a giant, and a little lady without legs or arms” and a “gentleman who earned his living by showing tricks upon the cards” and who can “put[...] small leaden lozenges into his

eyes and bring [...] them out at his mouth” (*Curiosity Shop* 111). They must leave this place also because it reminds them too much of the eclectically gothic subversiveness of the antiques shop.⁷⁰

An old schoolmaster’s home as his “School” (140): another inadequate place to stay in permanently, partly because, like the antiques shop that has to double as home and warehouse, it confuses the private and the public spheres, and partly because here it is Nell who encounters her own double. They are impelled to move on after Nell ‘learns’ (realizes) the ephemeral nature of her existence. The schoolmaster’s favorite pupil dies, reminding Nell of the possibility of her decease and its disastrous consequences for her grandfather; “for the dead boy had been a grandchild, and left but one aged relative to mourn his premature decay” (148). Departing from the schoolmaster’s home is Nell’s desperate attempt to escape her own fear of death.

A caravan: “a smart little house upon wheels” (149), which functions as “Jarley’s Wax Work” (154). “When Nell joins Mrs Jarley’s waxworks,” writes Hilary M. Schor, “she enters into a wider world of curiosities,” where she “proves so adept at *being* a commodity, that she soon begins to move freely *among* the commodities” (*Dickens* 35, italics in the original), “of which she was the chief attraction” (*Curiosity Shop* 164), therefore “an important item of the curiosities” (160). She was already regarded as a mere “youthful object” (Duncan 217), even “a kind of pornographic object” (Schor, *Dickens* 34) in the eye of Quilp in the antiques shop. Thus, a repeated relegation by Mrs Jarley to be an impersonal, though highly useful, domestic tool cannot appeal to her. Since the jumbled curiosities function as gothic doubles of the objectified Nell, she and her grandfather feel bound to move on again. During this period,

⁷⁰ A very different Nell Trent would have made herself at home in this place as well as in the whole universe of the novel; a weird daughter figure such as the one in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*: “a child—a dwarf—a girl—a something” (216), repeatedly mentioned as “the person of the house” (217, 236, 237), who, instead of showing unconditional empathy to her habitually drunk father, plays with the thought of punishing him by killing him while asleep (Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* 237). In this respect, this daughter figure is the diametrical opposite of little Nell and her relation to the surrounding, abnormal series of domesticity.

they enter once the previously mentioned public-house called The Valiant Soldier which turns out to be one of their most important transitory dwellings, as it is here that the grandfather's schizophrenic attitude to his granddaughter becomes obvious through his gambling and stealing.

From a psychological perspective, these events constitute the lowest point in the father-daughter relationship. The only chance for this relationship to be (ever) mended is by a hurried escape, leaving behind, among others, those who tempt the grandfather to gamble and crime (*Curiosity Shop* 240).

A boat having “neither oar nor sail, but was towed by a couple of horses” (241): a domestic setting that is a kind of a ‘mobile bridge’ between a dry riverbank and a river itself, suggesting the inability to make decisions concerning permanent domestic living spaces. Their decision, however, is made by the boatmen who are “drinking freely” and are “soon in a fair way of being quarrelsome and intoxicated” (242). A “quarrel led to a scuffle in which they beat each other fearfully, to [...] [Nell's] inexpressible terror,” which means that Nell and her grandfather are exposed to imminent physical danger from which they must flee on the first possible occasion (243, 244).

A manufacturing town: the grandfather and his granddaughter find themselves in “a crowded street [...] stood, amid its din and tumult, and in the pouring rain, as strange, bewildered, and confused, as if they had lived a thousand years before, and were raised from the dead and placed there by a miracle” (244). If the antiques shop in the beginning with its immobile articles symbolizes a kind of cultural death to escape from, than this town with its ‘mobile articles,’ “[t]he throng of people [who] hurried by, in two opposite streams, with no symptoms of cessation or exhaustion” suggests the same social/cultural morbidity in which “the two poor strangers [...] had no part [...]; feeling, amidst the crowd, a solitude which has

no parallel” (245). From this solitude, a feeling of being lost in society, a workman rescues them, leading them to a dry and warm place to spend the night in.

An iron foundry: another quite atypical domestic setting, to some extent in contrast with the surrounding industrial town. The narrator emphasizes the fearfully dynamic movements of machines normally found in such a place, thereby stressing the gigantic inanimate dynamism operated by only a handful of men. This monstrous ‘domestic’ scenery is the most spectacular example of the two subjects’ symbolic birth into casting molds, that is to say, into their own projections, without being able to create their own selves. This gothicized industrial space reminds little Nell and her grandfather again of the nightmare of becoming mere objects (of a warehouse). From the moment of their arrival, Nell and her grandfather regard this place as a temporary refuge, a port of distress from which they must move on as soon as possible:

In a large and lofty building, supported by pillars of iron [...] echoing to the roof with the beating of hammers and roar of furnaces, mingled with the hissing of red-hot metal plunged in water, and a hundred strange unearthly noises never heard elsewhere; in this gloomy place, moving like demons among the flame and smoke, dimly and fitfully seen, flushed and tormented by the burning fires, and wielding great weapons, a faulty blow from any one of which must have crushed some workman’s skull, a number of men laboured like giants. (*Curiosity Shop* 247-48)

The excessively colorful depiction of the gothic foundry inside suggests a metaphorical underworld. Words like “beating,” “roar,” “hissing,” “plunged,” “unearthly,” “gloomy,” “flame,” “smoke,” “flushed,” “tormented,” “burning,” “demons,” and “giants” all evoke a

noisy and hectic state of eternal perdition, in which—paradoxically—the two pilgrims can find (temporary) quiet and rest. This scene demonstrates contrasts at different levels: between the active, working machinery of the factory, suggesting inanimate vitality, and the passive travelers whose quiet sleep close to a burning furnace suggests vital inanimateness. Another contrast is revealed when we see Nell, after waking up, starting to converse with the workman who brought them here:

“I feared you were ill,” she said. “The other men are all in motion, and you are so very quiet.” “They leave me to myself,” he replied. “They know my humour. They laugh at me, but don’t harm me in it. See yonder there—that’s *my friend*.” “The fire?” said the child. “It has been alive as long as I have,” the man made answer. “We talk and think together all night long.” (*Curiosity Shop* 248-49, italics in the original)

This benevolent workman inadvertently depicts himself as the benign presiding genius of this gigantic hearth, the devil of this hell-like domesticity. The fire (of a hearth), frequently a starting point for meditation at climactic points,⁷¹ is similar to a book for him.

This workman experiences what Frances Armstrong explains as follows: “fire [...] provides warmth (and fresh air, by creating a draft), companionship, inspiration, a sense of power and an opportunity for family closeness reinforced by family ritual. Fire is [...] controllable by human power, it has something of the superhuman about it, to the extent of seeming at times almost a divine presence” (33). That is why the workman speaks of it in the following, personifying, way:

⁷¹ A hearth with fire is often represented by Dickens as a tranquil place to stop at to ponder on life while gazing at it, for instance, in *Dombey and Son* when the young and the old Paul sit together contemplating their respective, future paths of life (89-90); in *Hard Times*, when Louisa ponders on the future exoneration of Stephen Blackpool (144); and in *Little Dorrit*, when Arthur Clennam mentions his father’s name to his mother (47).

“[T]he only book I ever learned to read; and many an old story it tells me. Its music, for I should know its voice among the thousand, and there are other voices in its roar. It has its pictures too. You don't know how many strange faces and different scenes I trace in the red-hot coals. It's my memory, that fire, and shows me all my life.” The child, bending down to listen to his words, could not help remarking with what brightened eyes he continued to speak and muse. (*Curiosity Shop* 249)

It is as if the devil remembered his victims with bittersweet nostalgia, at the same time indirectly urging the homeless pilgrims to move on from this far-from-ideal resting place, thereby depriving Nell and the old man even of the meager possibility of a gothic domesticity.

Because of the ever present possibility of violence coming from characters such as Joe Jowl and Isaac List (knaveish gamblers), Mrs Jarley or Mrs Wackles (a venomous old school lady), Nell Trent must take advantage of her “adventurous freedom”, which Fred Botting identifies as the privilege of gothic heroines (4), and flee from one possible place of abode to another, trying to leave behind people who may hinder her and her grandfather's social advancement.

Already in the initial domestic setting, Nell and the grandfather's loyal friend, the young errand-boy Christopher (Kit) Nubbles, also realizes that they cannot lead their poorly established life in the antiques shop when he says to Nell: “This home is gone from you and him,” adding, as the first opportunity to choose another dwelling place, “[m]other and I have got a poor one, but that's better than this with all these people here [Daniel Quilp, the new proprietor of the shop, accompanied by Sampson Brass]; and why not come there till he's [the grandfather] had time to look about and find a better!” (73). If Nell had accepted this

suggestion, her domestic problems concerning her grandfather may have been solved once and for all; however, Nell is unable to give an affirmative answer—in fact, she says nothing—because of the untimely emergence of Mr Brass and Mr Quilp on the premises, and no more is said of this alternative (*Curiosity Shop* 73). The other person urging, or rather imposing, domestic changes on them is Daniel Quilp. His dialogue with the grandfather predicts the salvation-seeking progress:

“I don’t want to hurry you, you know, neighbour,” said the dwarf, [...] “but, as soon as you can arrange your future proceedings, the better.”

“Surely,” said the old man. “The better for all parties.”

“You see,” pursued Quilp after a short pause, “the goods being once removed, this house would be uncomfortable; uninhabitable in fact.”

“You say true,” returned the old man. [...]

“Then will you consider about it, neighbour?”

“I will, certainly,” replied the old man. “We shall not stop here.” (74)

Albeit it is Quilp’s express wish to remove the grandfather and little Nell from the shop, his ulterior motive is not to get rid of his business partner and his granddaughter, but to empty the building of their feeble presence. He knows that emptying the shop of “the goods” is tantamount to the eviction of Nell and the old man, in other words, it is only in this way that he is able to change the grotesque atmosphere of the shop into something worse: his own symbolic, antidomestic territory—with himself as its sole center.

In this respect, he acts like the social antithesis of the grandfather: the more dwelling places he manages to possess (even though they are not always directly connected to Nell’s grandfather), the more dwelling spaces, as potential starting points of a mutual new life, Nell

Trent and her grandfather lose (again, even if they are not directly connected to Quilp). In this way, Quilp becomes the guarantee of the protagonists' seemingly never-ending social-geographical pilgrimage as quest.

Daniel Quilp, this monstrous 'unfather' figure of the main plot and several sub-plots, aims to transform every domestic sphere into his own likeness, so that they should become his own malformed household imprint, by ousting its inhabitants without losing sight of them. However, since his master plan is based on keeping as many people under his evil influence as possible, thereby asserting his own superiority (as if trying to make up for his deficient height), his primary aim is to symbolically devour hitherto occupied domestic spaces.⁷² The more successful Quilp is in accomplishing his plan, the more often little Nell and her grandfather feel the necessity to move on, away from London, in their quest for freedom to become financially independent of (even other) figures like Quilp, whose transgressive presence undermines their ever fragile domestic family unity.

Initially, the grandfather's social incongruity manifests itself not only in his growing insanity but in somatic symptoms too. Normally, in the shop, "all was dark, and silent as the grave. [...] [I]t was black, cold and lifeless as before" (*Curiosity Shop* 17). This fake domestic space, a metonymy of death, causes a serious decline in the grandfather's health, attracting Quilp-like economic vampires to his apparently imminent death scene:

Quiet and solitude were destined to hold uninterrupted rule no longer, beneath the roof that sheltered the child. Next morning, the old man was in a raging fever accompanied with delirium; and sinking under the influence of this

⁷² The case is somewhat similar to the one in H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895). Kelly Hurley notes concerning this novel that "[w]ithin *The Time Machine*, cannibalism is the ultimate and most disgusting proof of abhumanness. The human reveals his bestiality by preying on his fellow, and the cannibalized victim is animalized" (86). Quilp's vampire-like greediness, combined with his grotesque figure and his all too frequently menacing behavior, enables him to affirm his financial bloodthirstiness in cannibalizing his victims (no one is exempt from his preying influence in the novel); while his victims, due to this aggressive animalization, try to flee from his presence as often as possible.

disorder he lay for many weeks in imminent peril of his life. There was watching enough, now, but it was the watching of strangers who made a greedy trade of it, and who, in the intervals in their attendance upon the sick man huddled together with a ghastly good-fellowship, and ate and drank and made merry; for disease and death were their ordinary household gods. (*Curiosity Shop* 68)

Although the word ‘watching’ alludes again to the Miltonian ‘stand and wait’ expression, watching here is only the grotesque parody of caring by strangers anxiously waiting for the old man’s death.

Dickens in this quotation raises the theme of “disease and death” to a mythical level by invoking the household gods (Lares and Penates from Roman mythology) as their metonymies, thereby emphasizing the plausible end (death) of the present domesticity. Such a repellent domestic (atmo)sphere makes it no longer possible for Nell and her grandfather to stay on, provided they do not wish to fall victims to the future owners of the shop, who, joining forces to form a kind of anti-community, “ate and drank and made merry” (68) with *biblical* negligence (*Authorized Version*, Luke 12:19) worshipping “their ordinary household gods,” expecting the imminent death of the curiosity-dealer.⁷³

Before and following their escape from the curiosity shop, even the place itself seems to undergo architectural necrosis, as though Nell and her grandfather had not only been attracted *away* from the shop due to their wanderlust in the hope of a bright common future, but as if they had also been driven *out* by the inanimate dwelling place itself. Andrew Smith broadly defines this phenomenon: “[T]he subject is constructed through a variety of

⁷³ A somewhat similar scene is before us in *Dombey and Son* where Dickens also magnifies the socioeconomic death throes of the father with a metonymic force of disintegrating gothic phenomena: Dombey’s crumbling house is visited by “herds of shabby vampires,” “fluffy and snuffy strangers,” “quiet, calculating spirits” (765, 766), to take advantage of the father’s exposed weakness as much as possible.

apparently uncategorisable impulses. This is manifested in an overt way through the Gothic's reliance upon nameless 'monsters' and spectral presences" (Smith 14), just like "the ghastly good fellowship" (*Curiosity Shop* 68) at the bedside of the grandfather. Here the subjects' construction is tantamount to their actions, which, more often than not, constitute a socially determined and forced pathway, at the end of which the father figure appears as his own victim: a fallen patriarch with self-absorbed feelings of a sufferer.

Every eclectic domestic setting left behind symbolizes, on the one hand, the grandfather's disturbed mind as a projection, on the other hand, little Nell's fears of an irreversible disruption of the parent-child relationship—always with the same strong allusion to the impossibility of establishing a house (in any sense of the word). These temporary domestic settings each testify to the crisis of the entire Victorian domestic ideology, in which, in fact, there is no place for a feeble father—even if he is accompanied by a strong daughter as his symbolic ally in life. And only at the end of the book does Dickens reveal that the pilgrims' progress has, in fact, always been the passion of a (female) redeemer.

Little Nell must die because only her death can call an ultimate and serious attention to the questionable social justification of the (grand)father figure as the sole representative of the weakened father function in the symbolic order of the novel. In this way, the novel succeeds in endowing the feeble grandfather with the fate of Nell Trent's biological father in such a way that it, at the same time, provides a solution to saving the social establishment and justifying the patriarchal domestic framework by creating a *patriarch surrogate* in the person of the grandfather's younger brother, who appears just in time before the grandfather's death—to persuade us of the plausible future resurrection of the family (400-401).

The death of a feeble father in order to pave the way for the emergence of a determined father figure within the same family is not a unique phenomenon in Dickens's fiction; one outstanding example is the matrimonial alliance of Amy Dorrit and Arthur

Clennam in *Little Dorrit* to substitute the Dorrit-type household with the Clennam-type domestic sphere, subtly anticipating the ever latent filial need for the fortification of a House—the social method of which is the thematic preoccupation of the next chapter.

Chapter 4. From Rags to Riches: (Self-)Confined Domesticity and the Father-Daughter Dyad in *Little Dorrit*

We are all conceived in close prison; in our mothers' wombs, we are close prisoners all; when we are born, we are born but to the liberty of the house; prisoners still, though within larger walls.

(John Donne, *Sermon XXV.*)

Dickens's *Little Dorrit* is exceptional among the novels analyzed in the present dissertation in that it explores family affairs through more than one father-daughter relationship. The novel presents two father figures and two daughter figures within the same domestic framework, intricately involved in parental-filial relations with one another in every possible combination. The ongoing vicissitudes of the Dorrit family and the resulting fraught interactions between William Dorrit (the biological father), Frederick Dorrit (William's brother, a symbolic father figure), Amy Dorrit (Little Dorrit, William's daughter), and Fanny Dorrit (Amy's elder sister, William's daughter also) are embedded in a unique, initially tangible, later on metaphoric, oppressive cultural context: a prison, or, more generally, a condition of imprisonment.

As I shall argue, *Little Dorrit* makes it clear that, for Dickens, without a strong, culturally/economically competent daughter figure (Amy), not even a frail domesticity (status quo in prison) is tenable. This means that without this daughter figure's instinctive as well as commonsensical decision to fulfill her assigned role in the symbolic order, the Dorrits (most of all, William Dorrit) would not have a chance to survive their own primary vicissitude (mental imprisonment) brought about by the father figures themselves.

Looking upon the two father figures and the two daughter figures as separate dyads, by far the greatest narrative emphasis falls on the William-Amy relationship. The William-Fanny, Frederick-Fanny, and Frederick-Amy dyads serve only as narrative props to direct

attention primarily to the Amy/William relationship functioning as an ever changing theater of power relations. It is important, however, to see that Frederick's and Fanny's presence within the domestic sphere is indispensable for William to be able to live out his blind familial ethos, thereby making it possible for Amy to appear as the *only* figure who can always see and show which direction to take for the Dorrits to have at least the chance to fulfill their separate symbolic roles in Victorian society.

Dickens lays unusually great emphasis on the primary daughter Amy Dorrit, especially compared with her siblings. She is portrayed as an outsider among the Dorrits, which, however, always amplifies her influential (domestic) presence in the master plot, especially beside her uncle, who indeed recognizes and acknowledges Amy's crucial role in supporting the Dorrit house. Her biological father, her sister, and her brother are symbolically blind—blind to everything that Amy does for the sake of redeeming the Dorrits not only from their physical imprisonment but also from their respective self-imposed mental confinements.⁷⁴ Amy Dorrit is unlike Florence Dombey, Nell Trent, or Louisa Gradgrind, who are all much more passive in their relationship with their father, while, at the same time, much more dependent on him, than Amy on hers.

On the one hand, Florence is a victim of her father's ignorance and blindness, living without a chance of facilitating his father's transformation. On the other hand, Nell is a stronger female character than Florence, but she cannot attain the kind of independent existence Amy has. Nell's surrogate father demands her constant, unconditional, saving presence to prevent the disappearance of his remaining sense of masculinity. It is Louisa who seems to have the most opportunities to transform her father due to their apparently close-knit

⁷⁴ It is not by accident that the only son figure, Edward Dorrit, is marginalized in the novel compared with his sisters. He all too frequently appears as an inept, immature boy than a son figure who one day would be able to govern the Dorrit household. His present cultural inability anticipates his inadequate, future domestic role fulfillment (*Dorrit* 75-77).

domestic life; however, by the time she reaches adulthood, every major decision is already made on her behalf by her father.

Amy Dorrit is the only daughter figure among the four Dickensian female protagonists who can define the symbolic as well as physical distance between herself and her father, doing this independently of her father's domestic presence- or absence-as-influence. As Barbara Hardy explains,

Little Dorrit herself is no complex psychological study, but a very effective character who manages to be both symbolic and sufficiently a creature of time and place. She has a certain grotesqueness—a stuntedness and sexlessness—which helps both to stylize her character as an image of virtue and to make her a more natural prison-child. (16)

What for instance Little Nell, as an angelic image of virtue, has is not missing from Little Dorrit either, but in Amy her angelic attributes are part of her physical presence in any domestic space. Despite what Hardy calls her “grotesqueness,” her natural ability to adapt to altered domestic circumstances, in which she differs from Nell, and her ability not to deceive herself in connection with her father's immovable mental state, shows her as an indisputable ‘domestic survivor.’⁷⁵

However, due to lack of strength in his uninfluential position in the family, Frederick Dorrit, as an exceptionally enervated father figure, can merely call attention to Amy's symbolic role enhanced by her capable domestic presence, without rendering her efficient help, which, combined with the other Dorrits' passive or even negative attitude to Amy,

⁷⁵ Comparing Amy with other Dickensian characters, Barbara Hardy calls her “Dickens's most successfully heroic character since *Oliver Twist*” (16), especially as Amy, the embodiment of domestic virtue, is finally able to overcome the hardships inflicted on her by her own family. According to Hardy, this is so precisely because “Dickens is interested in the conditioned character, but includes in his fiction a continuing fantasy about the ideal, the unconditional virtue. And in Dickens virtue is often the survivor” (4).

culminates in a self-redemption on Amy's part. Only she enjoys both physical and figurative freedom, while even at the end of the novel, everyone else within (or beyond) the Dorrit household is still, at least, metaphorically imprisoned. It could be argued that in all the four novels analyzed here, the home is mistaken for, or grotesquely combined with, an institution: the business firm in *Dombey and Son*, the school in *Hard Times*, the shop in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and the prison in *Little Dorrit*. Much of the metaphorical work of representing the domestic scenario is influenced by these allegorical institutional contexts.

In the opening episode of *Little Dorrit*, even the air is shown to be "imprisoned" in the Marseilles prison, anticipating the oppressive atmosphere of the Marshalsea: "A prison taint was on everything there. The imprisoned air, the imprisoned light, the imprisoned damp, the imprisoned men, were all deteriorated by confinement. As the captive men were faded and haggard, so the iron was rusty, the stone was slimy, the wood was rotten, the air was faint, the light was dim." The repetition of the word "imprisoned," indicates that this is the first in a series of spaces of confinement that have barely any connection with the outside world of freedom: "Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of the bright brightness outside; and would have kept its polluted atmosphere intact, in one of the spice islands of the Indian ocean" (3).

The power of this closed space/air is so enormous that it can also permeate the inmates' inner self, that is, "[a]s the occupants ingest and pick up what they and their companions have exhaled, it becomes difficult to distinguish sources of taint from victims of it. Both the person and the prison can be seen as soiling one another" (Yeats 346), that is why the "prison taint becomes a psychological and an ethical condition as well as a physical one" (347), making it difficult to separate the prisoner from the prison.⁷⁶ Mary Lenard observes

⁷⁶ Yeats, reminding us of the comprehensive significance of the 'air' in *Little Dorrit*, claims that "air often becomes, in both literal and metaphorical forms, a dirty thing: a conceit of epidemic miasma describes the spread of Merdle's schemes; the smoke pollution associated with both the Clennam house and Pancks indicates complicity with sordid affairs; the stagnancy of the Marshalsea's air contributes to the dangerous lassitude of the

that “[i]n a very real sense, this novel seems to begin in a prison and never to get out of it, simply because imprisonment manifests itself in so many ways that to be freed from one prison only means entering another” (Lenard 343). Beside the physical prisons, characters suffer in “metaphorical prisons like the Circumlocution Office and the polite society of the Merdles and the Barnacles, psychological prisons such as those of Henry Gowan and Miss Wade, and religious prisons like the rigid Calvinism of Mrs Clennam⁷⁷ (343). Prisons and other types of imprisonment are caused and maintained by dubious financial transactions behind the scenes, which influence the direction and evolution of the Dorrits’ domestic establishment, as well as the peripheral families related to the Dorrits. To shed some light on the underlying importance of several, surreptitious and no less erroneous money transfers referred to as, for instance, a “codicil” (*Dorrit* Bk. 2, Ch. 30) or an inherited “fortune” (Bk. 2, Ch. 34), not to mention certain comprehensive, hence vague, occasionally economic, terms such as a “fraudulent conduct” and “fraudulent secrets” (Bk. 1, Ch. 22, 27), the narrator illuminates, through the words of Mr Pancks (a rent collector), the financial predicament of the whole period stemming from the irresistible urge to make money⁷⁸:

A person who can’t pay, gets another person who can’t pay, to guarantee that he can pay. Like a person with two wooden legs getting another person with two wooden legs, to guarantee that he has got two natural legs. It don’t make

debtors. In each of these respects, *Little Dorrit* suggests equivalences between insalubrious socioeconomic climates and physically dirty atmospheres” (Yeats 334).

⁷⁷ Dennis Walder points out that Mrs Clennam is a victim of “a rigidly mechanistic conception of sin and guilt so as to ‘pay’ for withholding the codicil which would have released the Dorrits from servitude” (188). Lenard, however, reminds us that at the end of the novel, it is only “Little Dorrit [...] [who] frees both Arthur and his mother from the prison of their guilt” (343).

⁷⁸ According to Friedrich Engels, the members of the Victorian (lower) middle-class “believe that all human beings [...] have a real existence only if they make money or help to make it” (312). In the same vein, Georges Letissier claims that “money becomes invested with enormous fictitious value leading to the emergence of a new imaginary with regard to wealth itself. Precisely, *Little Dorrit* registers such a transformation and the coming onto the scene of the *homo economicus*, the hypothetical actor of political economy, craving gains, to the exclusion of all other pursuits” (266-67).

either of them able to do a walking match. And four wooden legs are more troublesome to you than two, when you don't want any. (*Dorrit* 273)

Mr Pancks's simplified reasoning for the encoded failure affecting the Victorian economic system haunts virtually every family in the novel, seriously endangering the fulfillment of their roles in the symbolic order. Oddly enough, however, once a family becomes bankrupt—especially to the point of suffering incarceration—in time, they are prone to “regard insolvency as the normal state of mankind, and the payment of debts as a disease that [only] occasionally broke out” (88).⁷⁹

An enormous financial crisis caused by contingencies shakes both the symbolic and economic foundation of William Dorrit's household to such a degree that it leaves an indelible mark on the father-daughter relationships in general, and on the whole Dorrit family's relation to Amy, to her attitude to life, in particular:

[A]lthough they had before them, every day, the means of comparison between her and one another and themselves, they regarded her as being in her necessary place; as holding a position towards them all which belonged to her, like her name or her age. [...] [T]hey viewed her, not as having risen away from the prison atmosphere, but as appertaining to it; as being vaguely what they had a right to expect, and nothing more. (94)

⁷⁹ Warning against a dangerous speculative investment is seen earlier in Dickens's fiction, in *Barnaby Rudge*, where Barnaby's mother with her seemingly down-to-earth mindset solemnly admonishes her son about the perils of hazardous dealings with riches as gold (354). The point, of course, is not the amount of invested money, but the manner it is dealt with, as is also seen in the last novel of Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), where a 'business transaction' is narrated between Edwin Drood and an old woman addicted to opium (139).

The menacing “they” as familial authority collides with the peripherally impersonal “her” as a subject of negligible importance. The consequence as family sentence is signified with the narratorial use of the legal verb “appertaining,” aiming to imprison Little Dorrit at least mentally, if physically it is not possible. Naturally, this familial approach to Amy, in the course of time, turns into a fundamental family regulation: “It was the family custom to lay it down as family law, that she [Amy] was a plain domestic little creature, without the great and sage experience of the rest,” culminating in the synoptic definition of the novel: “This family fiction was the family assertion of itself against her services. Not to make too much of them” (*Dorrit* 234).

The cultural difference as a self-driven wedge between Amy and the Dorrits carries no small contrastive importance. Galia Benziman, in connection with child representation in Dickens’s fiction, argues that “[t]he poor child-as-other serves as a juncture of textual contradiction, with a politically reformist impulse that is infiltrated by residues of stereotypes against working-class children as biologically inferior, morally untamed, and inherently, threateningly, different” (159). At first, one could immediately point out that Benziman’s statement does not apply to Little Dorrit since the Dorrits belong to the middle-class, which means that Amy is necessarily a middle-class-born child. However, the way she feels the moral/economic necessity to work for her family, makes her a true representative of an ideal working-class child: She is “the servant of servants,” says Avrom Fleishman, “the last and the least” who “reaches an absolute of servitude itself: she is the perfect servant, who loves those she serves” (580, 581).⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, she posits a threatening anticipatory force being projected toward the rest of her family suggesting their seemingly unavoidable relegation to the much-hated lower (working) class.

⁸⁰ Fleishman adds that Amy is “the lowest of the low [...] and her power is to lead the wretched, the servants, the prisoners, to bear their degradation with love” (580).

William's and especially Fanny's contempt toward the working layer of society is obvious, because, as Nancy Armstrong remarks, "middle-class intellectuals pitted representations of working-class culture as lacking all the individuating and hierarchizing features that characterized the bourgeois ideal of the family" ("History" 643),⁸¹ which ideal, somewhat inexplicably, excludes from the family circle such a daughter figure as Amy for her system of values.⁸² Therefore, a specific narrative intent focusing on Amy is inscribed in the novel, which Benziman defines as "the othering and suppression of the socially inferior child" on the part of the Dorrits, but this "occurs as part of the process of constructing the child-as-self as a target for identification" (159). Without the Dorrits', and especially William's, conscious marginalizing behavior, Amy would be quickly lost from sight, and probably Fanny (and not the barely manifest son figure, Edward) would become the filial protagonist of the novel.

However, the more Amy is suppressed, the greater the symbolic contrast between her and the others are, at the same time, the more obvious the inadequate role fulfillment is of William, Frederick, and Fanny in the symbolic order. Amy's identification entails the identification of the whole Dorrit house, defining their vulnerable domestic superstructure as their very own ethos. Their perverted narrative *communiqué* of domestic ideology ("It was the family custom to lay it down as family law, that she [Amy] was a plain domestic little creature, without the great and sage experience of the rest" [*Dorrit* 234]), even whose nonverbal manifestations in the novel contribute to drawing an explicit demarcation line between the master plot and the several, meandering, auxiliary plot-lines, is a significant case in point anticipating domestic problems emerging from the father-daughter dyad.

⁸¹ Earlier, Armstrong points out that behind the hatred and anger toward the working-class is the fear of "mechanization," that is, "diverse groups blamed mechanization for virtually every problem troubling England." Therefore, it seems natural that Amy's work ethos is quickly identified with problems stemming from the "unrest among the labouring poor" ("History" 642).

⁸² On the bourgeois family and its system of values, see, for instance, Karen Chase and Michael Levenson's *The Spectacle of Intimacy* (2000), 6, 76, 160; James Kilroy's *The Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (2007), 6, 12, 41; and Heather Brown's *Marx on Gender* (2012), 43-44. These works seek answers for the cultural ambiguities surrounding the Victorian bourgeois family.

Initially, Amy Dorrit's symbolic significance is represented by her narrative insignificance. Her first appearance very much reminds us of Florence Dombey's fictional *début*: "Affery, what girl was that in my mother's room just now?" "Girl?" said Mrs Flintwinch in a rather sharp key. "It was a girl, surely, whom I saw near you—almost hidden in the dark corner?" "Oh! She? Little Dorrit? *She's* nothing; she's a whim of—hers" (*Dorrit* 39-40, italics in the original). This dialogue takes place between Arthur Clennam (the future husband of Amy) and Affery Flintwinch (an old servant of Arthur's mother) immediately following Arthur's return from China to the Clennam house, and appropriately depicts Amy's often invisible, nevertheless always angelic, presence till the end of the novel in the life of those surrounding her. Amy Dorrit is evidently "[t]he angelic woman [who] has two main attributes—the power to convey a blessing by her unearned presence, and the ability to preserve everything including herself, from change" (Armstrong, *Dickens* 67).⁸³ Although Amy repeatedly proves both criteria in the novel, she does not do so to the same extent in her relationship with each Dorrit.

A narrative reminiscence helps to trace the origin of Little Dorrit's labor morale, which remains until the end of the novel diametrically opposed to the other Dorrits' approach to work (to life). In early childhood, she is already described as someone who "was inspired to be something which was not what the rest were, and to be that something, different and laborious, for the sake of the rest" (*Dorrit* 71). Her self-sacrificing nature enables her to see beyond the prison bars, to imagine a possible symbolic redemption for her whole family, and

⁸³ Armstrong defines Victorian angelic women the following way: "They are usually young [...], and in spite of their youth, comforting figures of stability, passing unchanged from child to adult with none of the trauma of puberty, and at the same time keeping the homes they live in as unchanged as possible. Although they are a power for good, there is no fear that they will cause uncomfortable moral disruption [...]." In conclusion, Armstrong states that these women "are often seen [...] as sources of strength if the need should arise, providing for men back-up support rather than competition for power" (*Dickens* 48). Armstrong's definition concisely summarizes the often hidden domestic presence of all the four investigated Dickensian heroines (Florence, Louisa, Nell, and Amy).

[n]o matter through what mistakes and discouragements, what ridicule (not unkindly meant, but deeply felt) of her youth and little figure, what humble consciousness of her own babyhood and want of strength, even in the matter of lifting and carrying; through how much weariness and hopelessness, and how many secret tears; she drudged on [...]. She took the place of eldest of the three, in all things but precedence; was the head of the fallen family; and bore, in her own heart, its anxieties and shames. (*Dorrit* 71-72)

Due to the continual hardships as a result of the Dorrits' inanity in family affairs, Amy very early becomes the symbolic (and economic) "head of the fallen family" so that the Dorrits may remain a family—at least in outward appearance, however fragmented it is—instead of falling into the state of a disconnected group of people related only by the same (empty) paternal cognomen.

With her needlework, Amy invisibly helps old Mrs Clennam lead a more or less comfortable life; at the same time, she earns money to support her impoverished and imprisoned family, who again barely notice her benevolent intervention in their domestic affairs. Especially the male members of the Dorrit family are reluctant to acknowledge Amy's hidden role in anything blissful and *blessful*. As Catherine Golden remarks: "The selfless Victorian angel approaches the divine on earth by functioning as the holy refuge for her brother, father, or husband, all of whom, in most cases, do not deserve her. Still, the angelic Dickensian woman offers unconditional love and support to her less moral male counterpart even if he unquestionably burdens her until he dies" (7).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Golden also writes that "[t]he Dickensian angel demonstrates a model of womanhood, exceedingly popular in the 1840s and 50s, that seems too saccharine, self-effacing, and domestic to a late-twentieth-century readership [as well as to us]." She adds that Agnes in Dickens's *David Copperfield* "[a]cting as surrogate wife to her rapidly deteriorating father and sister to David, [...] embodies the qualities of the angel in the house, immortalized in Coventry Patmore's sequence of poems *The Angel in the House* (1854-63): patience, unselfishness, earnestness, faithfulness, and devotion" (6). However, when at last David marries Agnes, he experiences the "[t]he happiness

This is precisely the case with William and Frederick Dorrit, whose mere presence in Amy's life is tantamount to continual physical and mental burden on her until they both die ("[T]hey were lazily habituated to her" [*Dorrit* 94]). Amy's name itself (the derivation of the French verb 'aimer' meaning 'to love'), similarly to Florence Dombey's, conceals her fundamental merit connected to her seemingly predestined life to serve others selflessly, primarily in the Dorrit household, where she tries to live up to the expectations of the Dorrit family ethos which is dangerously approaching what Patricia E. Johnson defines as the "domestic ideology," which is "rested on the exploitation of the working-class woman, both working double shifts in working-class homes and working for low pay as domestic servants in middle- and upper-class homes" (7).

As was noted before, Amy's early detailed description, her hardly palpable feminine presence, is suggesting marked narrative intention to draw attention to her by *hiding* her figure-as-significance as much as possible. The narrator depicts her with as simple sentences as possible suggesting a sheer factuality for her peripheral existence:

Little Dorrit let herself out to do needlework. [...] [F]rom eight to eight, Little Dorrit was to be hired. Punctual to the moment, Little Dorrit appeared; punctual to the moment, Little Dorrit vanished. What became of Little Dorrit between the two eights was a mystery. Another of the moral phenomena of Little Dorrit. [...] She had an extraordinary repugnance to dining in company; would never do so, if it were possible to escape. Would always plead that she had this bit of work to begin first, or that bit of work to finish first [...]. It was not easy to make out Little Dorrit's face; she was so retiring, plied her needle

Agnes instills [...] as an aspect of her nature rather than as a product of her skillful organization and control" (Langland 299).

in such removed corners, and started away so scared if encountered on the stairs. (*Dorrit* 52-53).

Despite Amy's name being repeated here *ad nauseam*, her narrative importance as a flesh-and-blood character remains obscure for a long time, as if what counts is what is being done, and not at all by whom. She behaves as a truly self-imposed outcast, who demonstratively sets her activities ahead of her self. It is especially seen in the oppressive middle-class *milieu* surrounding her either in Mrs Clennam's house or in the Marshalsea: in the circle of bankrupt (former) middle-class people. Her often barely visible presence, however, frequently anticipates subversiveness, due to her puritanical work ethic, which unavoidably separates her from the whole Dorrit family. Amy (as well as Fanny) cannot receive proper education meant for decent middle-class daughters on account of their father being incarcerated in the Marshalsea: "There was no instruction for [...] them at home; [...] she [Amy] knew well—no one better—that a man so broken as to be [...] [her father], could be no father to his own children" (72), but of the two daughters, Amy, unlike Fanny, is able to lay down the foundation of a future household due to her strong life instincts proved by her common sense and untiring work.⁸⁵ Fanny always appears as a useless spoiled 'lady,' whereas Amy's worth lies in continually acting as a useful 'little mother,' among others, toward her sister and her idle brother Edward (Bk. 1, Ch. 7.).

The daughters' father, despite his respectable title imposed upon him⁸⁶ ("the Father of the Marshalsea" 65), and the subsequent, scattered, patriarchal allusions ("a great moral Lord Chesterfield, or Master of the ethical ceremonies of the Marshalsea" 229, "the Chief of the

⁸⁵ "Would-be reformers of women's education, of whatever hue," writes Simon Morgan, "tended to begin from the premise that the middle-classes were educating their daughters as decorative toys; in other words as 'ladies', [...] but very little else," therefore, "such an education made women worse than useless [...] incapable of fulfilling any serious role in society" (36).

⁸⁶ Originally, William Dorrit inherited his respectable title from a turnkey who looked upon him with almost religious devotion (*Dorrit* 63-64, 65).

important tribe” *Dorrit* 434), is represented, at the time of his incarceration, as a feeble paternal figure who is prone to drifting with his not-necessarily-adverse circumstances. William Dorrit never and nowhere suggests an ability to act efficiently in his own interest, strangely enough, not even in the Marshalsea prison, in this unique patriarchal world tailored to his mundane needs.⁸⁷ The narrator describes the Dorrit patriarch emphasizing mostly his dominantly feminine appearance: “He was, at that time, a very amiable and very helpless middle-aged gentleman [...]. He was a shy, retiring man; well-looking, though in an effeminate style; with a mild voice, curling hair, and irresolute hands [...] which nervously wandered to his trembling lip a hundred times in the first half-hour of his acquaintance with the jail” (58). This description makes it hard to imagine William Dorrit to possess later on in the prison his first imposing epithet (“the Father of the Marshalsea” [65]), unless it is meant to be a *sobriquet*, since his first appearance as an inmate implies a kind of latent fear stemming from incongruous timidity concerning the prison: Though “he grew to be proud of the title,” whenever “any impostor had arisen to claim it, he would have shed tears in resentment of the attempt to deprive him of his rights” (65). His antiheroic reaction naturally comes from his existential uncertainty, which is further stressed when the narrator touches upon the relation between the vague reason for his imprisonment and his feeble comprehension of it:

The affairs of this debtor were perplexed by a partnership, of which he knew no more than that he had invested money in it [...] and as nobody on the face of the earth could be more incapable of explaining any single item in the heap of confusion than the debtor himself, nothing comprehensible could be made of his case. To question him in detail, and endeavour to reconcile his answers

⁸⁷ Elaine Showalter, referring to *The Pamphleteer* [1815], points out that “[t]he real Marshalsea was a mild prison, much more tolerant in its regime than Newgate or the Bastille [...]. Discipline was so casual that smugglers, [...] a higher security section of the building, regularly consorted with the debtors, an arrangement obviously to the advantage of both groups” (22-23).

[...] was only to put the case out at compound interest and incomprehensibility. The irresolute fingers fluttered more and more ineffectually about the trembling lip on every such occasion, and the sharpest practitioners gave him up as a hopeless job. (*Dorrit* 59)⁸⁸

In the initial period of his incarceration, when William Dorrit reacts to a problem, however small it may seem, concerning his (family) affairs, his agitated uncertainty is always betrayed by his “irresolute hands/fingers.” Seven instances can be enumerated in relatively quick succession (58, 59, 60, 62, 66), when this somatic phenomenon alludes to his symbolic as well as real inability to tackle problematic domestic situations.

Dianne Sadoff explains the apparent paradox between the evidently feeble father figure and the cultural height of inmate appreciation and honor quickly reached by him: “Dorrit’s authority as Father of the Marshalsea depends wholly on an ironic and debased precedence, his seniority as a prison inmate. His humbug gentlemanliness, his patronage and condescension as public Father cover up an ‘effeminate style’ and ‘irresolute hands’ (239). Sadoff summarily states, as a symbolic verdict, that this father figure “helplessly depends on those who should be dependent on him” (239),⁸⁹ implying both people within the prison: “It became a not unusual circumstance for letters to be put under his door at night, enclosing half-a-crown, two half-crowns, now and then at long intervals even half-a-sovereign, for the Father of the Marshalsea” (*Dorrit* 65), and people outside of it: “The letter is from Mr Clennam. [...] As the Father glanced into the letter (there was a bank-note in it), he reddened a little, and patted Amy on the head afresh” (370-71), acknowledging her daughter’s lucrative goodwill

⁸⁸ Diane Elam writes that “Dickens identifies capitalism as primarily an economy of debt and interest (rather than of production and consumption) so that the state of the economy may be measured in terms of the relation between money and time. Given the invisibility of capital itself, its working appears only in the time of interest as return on capital. Speculative disaster proceeds from the over-acceleration of this time, money made too quickly to be understood” (164). The Dorrit family’s vicissitudinous financial career, as the backbone of the main plot, displays a poverty-wealth-poverty oscillation of the kind that Elam describes.

⁸⁹ Sadoff argues that, despite all his paternalistic allures, “[a]s Father, Dorrit disowns paternity and purpose and abdicates authentic authority; he appears to be as absent and as dead a father as Clennam’s” (239).

toward Arthur. William Dorrit, as David Holbrook remarks, “does not feel helplessly shut up. He enjoys being a kind of prison baron—but does little or nothing for the welfare of those who grant him such false deference,” pointing out further that “[t]he Marshalsea holds those who have nothing or less than nothing; they are imprisoned because they are minus quantities. They have no identities, yet even here Dorrit creates himself a role or identity of sorts” (81).

Edwin Barrett goes even further when explaining the inexplicably humble approach of people toward the Dorrit patriarch who sometimes behaves even “with the air of an affable and accessible Sovereign” (374-75), drawing significant parallels between the notions of the patriarch’s *dignity, fall, debt* and *captivity*: “In the Marshalsea he has been reduced to believing that his dignity is the greater according to the depth of his fall, the amount of debt with which he came into the prison, and his length of captivity” (210).⁹⁰ When William eventually leaves the Marshalsea, he enters “into an even falser condition, in which the pretense is to be maintained that he has never been in” (210).⁹¹ In the second part of the novel, the narrator calls attention to the father’s hopeless struggle against his prison past through a grotesque dialogue between him and his daughter Amy:

“There is a—hum—a topic,” said Mr Dorrit, looking all about the ceiling of the room, and never at the attentive, uncomplainingly shocked face, “a painful topic, a series of events which I wish—ha—altogether to obliterate. This is understood by your sister, who has already remonstrated with you in my presence; it is understood by your brother; it is understood by—ha hum—by every one of delicacy and sensitiveness except yourself—ha—I am sorry to

⁹⁰ To understand the severity of the punishment for debts, it is to note that an incarceration lasted “until the debt was paid, which might mean imprisonment for life, in small, damp, crowded rooms, without beds. [...] The law [concerning debtors] was gradually reformed in England by various statutes from 1844 to 1846, and imprisonment was finally abolished in 1869” (Gest 415).

⁹¹ Barrett also notes that Dickens “moves the reader through a series of prisons, real and symbolic, [...] but not in the character of the prison reformer; rather, in that of the sanitary and ultimately moral reformer. [...] [H]e detects the stinks and the stale airs and traces the operations of their poisons upon men’s physical and social bodies, upon their moral and spiritual natures” (215).

say, except yourself. You, Amy—hum—you alone and only you—constantly revive the topic, though not in words.” (*Dorrit* 478)

His falser condition, “the lap of fortune” (480)—in which, as is seen, Amy is exclusively blamed for reminding her father of their shared past—is, by all means, a symbolic degeneration, as the negation of their past prison life automatically creates in William the permanent delusion of mental freedom, which delusion, however, functions merely as another private (mental) confinement, in which, in addition, he cannot get rid of the haunting ghost of his former Marshalsea life.

Amy’s presence close to her father is incongruous, since her unaristocratic behavior constantly and unavoidably makes her father remember their rejected past. The dialogue between the father and the daughter quickly turns into the father’s dramatic monologue in which William tries to exert his utmost paternal influence for Amy to turn a new leaf by, first of all, entirely disconnecting herself with the Marshalsea:

“I was there all those years. I was—ha—universally acknowledged as the head of the place. I—hum—I caused you to be respected there, Amy. I—ha hum—I gave my family a position there. I deserve a return. I claim a return. I say, sweep it off the face of the earth and begin afresh. Is that much? I ask, is *that* much? [...] I have suffered. Probably I know how much I have suffered better than any one—ha—I say than any one! If *I* can put that aside, if *I* can eradicate the marks of what I have endured, and can emerge before the world—a—ha—gentleman unspoiled, unspotted—is it a great deal to expect—I say again, is it a great deal to expect—that my children should—hum—do the same and sweep that accursed experience off the face of the earth?” (479)

By way of psychological self-defence, William uses the words “years,” and “experience,” instead of a *prison life* as well as “place,” and “there” instead of a *prison*. His dramatic attack is enhanced with rhetorical questions, paradoxically, to brace himself against his daughter’s presence in his life. This verbal strategy, however, all the more chains him to everything the Marshalsea means, because, as was earlier pointed out, without the Marshalsea, its Father cannot exist either.

As a last resort, the father sets his other children in front of Amy as positive examples contrasting her with them to forcefully suggest that Little Dorrit by no means lives up to the paternal domestic expectations:

“Your sister does it. Your brother does it. You alone, my favourite child, whom I made the friend and companion of my life when you were a mere—hum—Baby, do not do it. You alone say you can’t do it. I provide you with valuable assistance to do it. [...] Is it surprising that I should be displeased? Is it necessary that I should defend myself for expressing my displeasure? No!”
Notwithstanding which, he continued to defend himself, without any abatement of his flushed mood. (*Dorrit* 479)

The father’s desire clashes with the daughter’s antagonistic behavior. The paternal reference to Amy as “the friend and companion” of his life, subtly points beyond the presence of a metaphoric wife figure, attaining rather the deeper, cultural significance of the ‘little mother’ image.⁹² Not simply because Amy is frequently mentioned or called “little mother” by the

⁹² The ‘little mother’ image implies the domestic presence of a surrogate mother, who is not necessarily a precocious child. And since the emphasis of this feminine image falls on the daughter’s maternal role fulfillment in the absence of the mother, the daughter’s age is of secondary importance despite the diminutive adjective before the word ‘mother’. Other female characters such as Ethel Newcome in William Thackeray’s *The Newcomes* as well as Mirah Lapidoth in George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876) also act as ‘little mothers’ beside their fathers.

narrator or by her *protégée*, Maggy (*Dorrit* Bk. 1, Ch. 9, 14, 22; Bk. 2, Ch. 4, 13, 34), but because Little Dorrit has always approached her father in his prosaic needs as a scrupulous mother figure/mother surrogate, even from her early childhood (69, 71).⁹³

While the prison as a domestic setting from the angle of the father-of-the-Marshalsea metaphor is meant to represent a cultural elevation for the father, William Dorrit is quickly relegated to a seemingly ordinary domestic plane when Little Dorrit, in turn, is introduced as the “Child of the Marshalsea” who not only “kept the family room, or wandered about the prison-yard, for the first eight years of her life” (69), but has always been permitted to leave the prison whenever she wishes. However, unlike her father, Amy does not inherit her title from anyone, consequently, she is never called in this way by anyone. Only the narrator refers to her in this manner to indicate her lower (than her father’s) status in the world of the Marshalsea prison.

“The paradox of Amy’s identity is,” explains Hilary M. Schor, “of course, that as the only child to love the prison, she is the only one who is truly able to leave it: to leave the Marshalsea,” however, means “to leave her father behind” (*Dickens* 138). Thus William and Amy, instead of being real notabilities, are, after all, simply a father and a daughter.

Amy’s appearance as “the child of the Father of the Marshalsea” (*Dorrit* 69) enables one to see her father as the metonymy of this particular prison and imprisonment *per se*: The Father and the Marshalsea are one. What is more, this paternal figure (unlike his brother, Frederick) embodies the paternalistic institution to such a degree that wherever he appears—out of prison under luxurious circumstances—the distorted cultural atmosphere of the Marshalsea is very soon unavoidably recreated in his mind.⁹⁴ It seems as if the whole Dorrit

⁹³ “As well as a blessing, however, the heroine’s womanliness raises a conflict,” writes Alison Booth, adding that “Little Dorrit, ‘little mother,’ is emphatically maternal *and* diminutive, with a comic or uncanny exemption from sexual desire” (203, italics in the original), in this respect, she is unusually similar to Little Nell, the other disturbingly other-worldly Dickensian anti-heroine.

⁹⁴ Dickens mentions seven times the proper name of this prison, scattered in various chapter titles (*Dorrit* Bk. 1 Ch. 6, 7, 19, 36; Bk. 2 Ch. 27, 28, 29). All of these chapters, directly or indirectly, emphasize the Marshalsea

house, through the father as a symbolic channel, were destined to be always dragged back to the initial stage and state of their domesticity.

Not surprisingly, as a small child in the confined physical presence of her father, Amy Dorrit is almost convinced that this is, in fact, a normal state of existence. However, one normal state of existence does not exclude the possibility of an entirely different one in her imagination, therefore, “[w]istful and wondering, she would sit in summer weather by the high fender in the lodge, looking up at the sky through the barred window, until, when she turned her eyes away, bars of light would arise between her and her friend, and she would see him through a grating, too” (*Dorrit* 69). Amy now, sharing her daydreaming with a prison guard, reveals the way she perceives the outside world from inside:

“Thinking of the fields,” the turnkey said once, after watching her, “ain’t you?”

“Where are they?” she inquired.

“Why, they’re—over there, my dear,” said the turnkey, with a vague flourish of his key. “Just about there.”

“Does anybody open them, and shut them? Are they locked?”

The turnkey was discomfited. “Well,” he said. “Not in general.” (69)

The only important question for Little Dorrit is whether an existing living space is tantamount to a circumscribed lockable confinement; or perhaps, whether the outside world, in general, has prescribed demarcation lines to define anyone’s free movement.

The ongoing dialogue between Amy and the turnkey, moreover, reveals her symbolic dependence on her father, as the embodiment of a culturally definitive frame of reference. Her

prison’s centrality as the novel’s thematic anchor rooted in William Dorrit, alluding back to the beginning of his shabby-gentility in the prison *milieu*: “All new-comers were presented to him. He was punctilious in the exaction of this ceremony. [...] They were welcome to the Marshalsea, he would tell them. Yes, he was the Father of the place. So the world was kind enough to call him; and so he was, if more than twenty years of residence gave him a claim to the title” (*Dorrit* 65).

subsequent questions disclose that the value of any (domestic) space other than the Marshalsea is ultimately determined by her father's opinion: "Are they very pretty, Bob?", "Is it very pleasant to be there, Bob?", "Was father ever there?", "Is he sorry not to be there now?" (*Dorrit* 69-70). Amy, accordingly, wishes to look upon her father as the law-maker of the symbolic order, despite the fact that William and Frederick not even together can produce the impression of a strong symbolic father figure in her mind. In addition, Frederick's representation in the novel is diametrically opposed to his insights respecting the Amy-Dorrits conflicts, thereby his presence simultaneously strengthens and weakens his brother's symbolic position in the Dorrit domesticity. With his initial description, Dickens alludes to his enervated nature, which functions as his personal, figurative imprisonment. "There was a ruined uncle in the family group [...]. Naturally a retired and simple man, he had shown no particular sense of being ruined at the time when that calamity fell upon him, further than that he left off washing himself when the shock was announced, and never took to that luxury any more" (74). Whereas William at least endeavors to sustain a fake gentility, Frederick spectacularly succumbs to the family ruin, and like a sociosymptomatic hermit, renounces the daily use of soap to prove his self-infliction as a demonstrative objection to the family's domestic circumstances: "[H]e would have accepted an illness, a legacy, a feast, starvation—anything but soap" (74).

Long after being released from prison, Frederick's objection remains despite the family's dramatically altered domesticity. The reason behind his antagonistic behavior is that only economic changes take place in the family, while the attitude of William, Fanny, and Edward has not changed. This leads to a memorable scene connected to one of the two most important Victorian focal spaces of domestic communication, the dining table, where any accumulated tension may find a valve.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ The other one is the hearth (see footnote 71 above).

It was not observed that Uncle had pushed away his plate, and forgotten his breakfast; but he was not much observed at any time, except by Little Dorrit. The servants were recalled, and the meal proceeded to its conclusion. [...] Little Dorrit rose and left the table. When Edward and Fanny remained whispering together across it, and when Mr Dorrit remained eating figs and reading a French newspaper, Uncle suddenly fixed the attention of all three by rising out of his chair, striking his hand upon the table [...]. (*Dorrit* 484)

Frederick, William's *doppelgänger* and perhaps rebellious conscience, manages to produce such a dramatic moment that the narrator quickly adds that "[i]f he had made a proclamation in an unknown tongue, and given up the ghost immediately afterwards, he could not have astounded his audience more. The paper fell from Mr Dorrit's hand, and he sat petrified, with a fig half way to his mouth" (484-85). At least two unspoken questions might disturb the mind of William, Fanny, and Edward at the family table: Why does Frederick strike the table, and why Frederick strikes the table?

The subsequent words of Frederick Dorrit, revealing unexpected force that is in contrast to his brother's habitual, mostly feeble, *staccato* manner of speech,⁹⁶ explains his unusual table manners without, however, revealing anything tangible that the Dorrits would not have known or sensed directly or indirectly for long:

"My dear Frederick!" exclaimed Mr Dorrit faintly. "What is wrong? What is the matter?" [...]

"Brother, I protest against pride. I protest against ingratitude. I protest against any one of us here who have known what we have known, and have seen what

⁹⁶ See, for instance, pages 84, 226, 437, and 441 in the novel.

we have seen, setting up any pretension that puts Amy at a moment's disadvantage, or to the cost of a moment's pain." (*Dorrit* 485)

Frederick's tirade is cautious: While he blames the whole family for Amy's unacceptable domestic treatment, he consciously lays the smallest blame on his brother (strangely enough, his nephew, Edward, is not even mentioned), at the same time, relentlessly attacks Fanny to offset her always descending attitude to Amy, in this way, however, giving a chance for the other Dorrits to take his harsh words upon themselves:

"How dare you," said the old man, turning round on Fanny, "how dare you do it? Have you no memory? Have you no heart?" [...] "[W]here's your affectionate invaluable friend? Where's your devoted guardian? Where's your more than mother? How dare you set up superiorities against all these characters combined in your sister?" (485)

Frederick, without intending to turn the power relations upside down in the family, that is, without weakening the paternal position of his brother (later on, he even asks for his brother's forgiveness for his blunt manners),⁹⁷ draws attention to Amy's symbolic significance highlighting her intrinsic attributes seen through Fanny's life: "invaluable friend", "devoted guardian", "more than mother." His eight emphatic rhetorical questions would demand answers, although his intention is, of course, not to know the exact location of his now absent niece, but to coerce—at last and at least once from the others—the acknowledgement of Little

⁹⁷ Since Frederick tries to act as a father surrogate in the life Amy, Fanny, and Edward, it would be illogical to weaken his brother's position in the symbolic order, because that would entail his weakened state as well. A covert point of his argument is to counterbalance the educational hiatus which his brother William, from the beginning of the novel till its end, manifests toward his children.

Dorrit's symbolic absence, due to her externally constrained absenteeism from their precarious domestic world.

Amy's absenteeism may even be seen as a kind of subtle imprisonment: She is incarcerated by her family in a symbolic realm found *beyond* the Dorrits' domesticity proper (an outsider), to a degree similarly to Florence Dombey (a *metoikos*), Little Nell (an angel), and Louisa Gradgrind (a pre-programmed cogwheel). Thus, despite all her self-sacrificing altruism, Amy cannot avoid being ostracized, since for her family she is disturbingly "the vital core of sincerity, the conscience, the courage of moral percipience, [and] the saving realism, that preserves for them the necessary bare minimum of the real beneath the fantastic play of snobberies, pretences and self-deceptions" (Leavis and Leavis 298), which could enable the Dorrits to substantially connect life with reality.⁹⁸

Fanny, "who—[on other occasions] pure untroubled selfhood—is Little Dorrit's antithesis" (346), reacts on her uncle's verbal attack bringing to light the central reason for Amy's familial exclusion bordering on total rejection. Her reply (but not *answer*) discloses the depth of the others' metaphorical blindness as well, toward all that Amy represents:

"I love Amy," cried Miss Fanny, sobbing and weeping, "as well as I love my life—better than I love my life. I don't deserve to be so treated. I am as grateful to Amy, and as fond of Amy, as it's possible for any human being to be. I wish I was dead. I never was so wickedly wronged. And only because I am anxious for the family credit." (*Dorrit* 485)

⁹⁸ Amy Dorrit's "genius is to be always beyond question genuine—real. She is indefectibly real, and a test of reality for the other," writes F. R. Leavis, suggesting that Amy, in fact, is a potential threat for her family, who can at any moment shatter their comfortable false reality by reminding them of who and what they really are (qtd. in Leavis and Leavis 298).

What Fanny says indicates at least three important points in the light of the main plot: (i) Fanny, albeit melodramatic, is serious—there is no trace of cynism in what she says, (ii) she uses the notion of the “family credit” as a metaphorical shield against her uncle’s verbal attack, to ascertain the whole family’s often negative behavior toward Amy, and (iii) the mindset of the Dorrits’ is, in fact, their own mental imprisonment from which they seemingly do not desire to escape.

The greatest hole, however, in this patriarchal discourse is that even Frederick is silent regarding Amy’s domestic rehabilitation, although, as was pointed out before, he vehemently “protests” against the humiliating family practice (*Dorrit* 485). This is because William and Frederick can never on their own overcome their deep-rooted inability to act as strong and caring *paterfamilias* to the Dorrit household, that is, they cannot assume their symbolic role in the symbolic order. This necessarily entails that since “symbolic systems are inevitably culture-bound, this lack of center is conceptualized as the loss of the father” (Beizer 5). In the light of the symbolic or biological loss of the father (figures), the only question remaining: How can a symbolically strong daughter figure offset the domestic instability in society, in the symbolic order, if she finds no ally in her sister or brother; in addition, they also contribute to maintaining her marginalized domestic status?

Uncle Frederick clearly pinpoints this domestic issue when he succinctly compares Amy’s domestic merit with the other three Dorrits’ mere (parasitic) existence: “My brother would have been quite lost without Amy. [...] We should all have been lost without Amy. She is a very good girl, Amy. She does her duty” (*Dorrit* 94), to put it more precisely, Little Dorrit willingly fulfills her filial role in the symbolic order, whereas, the other three do theirs only to such a degree as Amy enables them. Arlene Young, summarizing the cultural value of Amy’s effective domestic presence, comments that,

[s]he is indeed the quintessential domestic woman, the Victorian “angel in the house,” no matter what sort of dwelling she may inhabit. Domestic comfort and security abide with her wherever she may be, whether in the Marshalsea, the cold night streets of London, the fashionable hotels of Italy, or the secluded corners of the Clannem and Casby homes where she sits sewing. (Young, “Virtue” 505)

Since Amy provides for “domestic comfort and security” at the same time, and because she is “both intelligent and capable, and even more significantly, her speech is articulate and her manners refined; while she is excessively shy,” it is hardly surprising that Amy is “never really a part of the worlds or fragments of worlds through which she moves, nor is she [really] a part of any of the classes associated with them” (505). Young, contrasting her character with the domestic settings she is repeatedly found in, declares that “She is [...] too virtuous to belong in a prison, too honest and artless to be a success in society, too intelligent and refined to be a simple seamstress,” further adding to define Amy’s place in society that “[s]he inhabits instead a singularity, an aristocracy of virtue that transcends the bondage of class or of iron bars. She defines a rank of which she is the sole member” (505), thus her mere appearance is enough to guarantee subversiveness in the diverse domestic spheres she enters.

Little Dorrit, however, does not intend to *consciously* subvert the power relations within the Dorrit microcosm, rather, she gently keeps reminding her close relatives to live reality in its actual form, instead of creating and living in a false symbolic world maintained both by a financially shady Victorian society as well as its bankrupt, middle-class representatives who are also its victims, like the Dorrits themselves. Her efforts continually prove to be futile. On one occasion, she is even accused of cruelty in her behavior toward her family: “The way in which you are resolved and determined to disgrace us on all occasions, is

really infamous. [...] The principal pleasure of your life is to remind your family of their misfortunes. And the next great pleasure of your existence is to keep low company” (*Dorrit* 367, 368). The wrongdoing incurring Fanny’s reproach here is that Amy is willing to be seen walking in public with an impoverished, feeble old man, John Edward Nandy, a Workhouse friend and another *doppelgänger* of William Dorrit.

Fanny’s perverted blind rage knows no bounds when she unscrupulously attacks Amy in the presence of the old man in the open street, at the same time, it reveals her arrogantly desperate desire to get rid of the symbolic shackles that is keeping her in the very much rejected, middle-class existence:

“The idea of coming along the open streets, in the broad light of day, with a Pauper!”

“O Fanny!”

“I tell you not to Fanny me, for I’ll not submit to it! I never knew such a thing.

“Does it disgrace anybody,” said Little Dorrit, very gently, “to take care of this poor old man?”

“Yes, miss,” [...] “and you ought to know it does. And you do know it does, and you do it because you know it does. [...] But, however, if you have no sense of decency, I have. You’ll please to allow me to go on the other side of the way, unmolested.” (367-68)

The case above is by no means an isolated instance as far as the fragile nature of the sisters’ relationship is concerned. Fanny is not willing to identify herself with Amy’s philanthropic aptitude (she, in fact, looks upon it as a sure sign of symbolic backslide or even downfall in society), not even when her father’s or brother’s health is at stake. Since Fanny wants to

maintain the *façade* of upward mobility in society, neither being stuck in the middle-class, not being possibly lowered to the lower (laboring) class is acceptable in her eye. Her attack is against what Amy represents, and not who she is. Later on, already as a wife, Fanny speaks like a mature lady, as though she appreciated Little Dorrit's domestic efforts as a nurse beside their father and their brother, calling her a "poor little pet," "good little Mouse," "perfection," and the "best of Amys" (*Dorrit* 697).

Paradoxically, Fanny tells Amy, without irony, that she intends to "rouse [her] to a sense of duty" (608) in the interest of their father. Later, she declares in her absence that "Amy [...] will require to be roused from the effects of many tedious and anxious weeks. And [...], she will require to be roused from a low tendency which [...] [Fanny] know[s] very well to be at the bottom of her heart" (698). This "low tendency" is, however, what distinguishes Amy from the rest of the Dorrit house to such an extent that only she can be seen in the novel as a more-or-less free person. She is, on the one hand, free from every symbolic constraint that would otherwise force her to fulfill her familially prescribed role in the symbolic order, on the other hand, she is not a Marshalsea inmate.

Amy's idiosyncratic freedom is barely affected by surrounding, matter-of-fact, domestic circumstances, because she constantly steels herself with what is seen by Dickens as intrinsic feminine strength in her relationship with her father (as well as with her uncle). However, she "ultimately undermine[s] his status, his authority, and his power as lawgiver and regulator of family, social and narrative codes" (Beizer 4). In this sense, *Little Dorrit* is typical of "[t]he nineteenth-century text," which "divided against itself, repeatedly undercuts the proffered images of its own authority" (4), in this case, the no longer (or rather, never again) all-powerful Dorrit *paterfamilias*.⁹⁹ This subversion, always accomplished by a strong

⁹⁹ Albeit eighteenth-century fiction, such as Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), or Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*, depicts powerful fathers with unquestionable authority at home, the case becomes dramatically transformed in nineteenth-century literature. Beside Dickens, novelists like Jane Austen (*Pride and Prejudice* [1813]), Anthony Trollope (*The Warden* [1855] and *Barchester Towers* [1857]) as

daughter figure, naturally leads to “a drastic overhaul of domestic life” (Tosh, *Man’s Place* 153), which in turn must inevitably result in somewhat altered power relations in the family.¹⁰⁰

Amy’s filial affection is the mainspring in initiating the reorganization of the patriarchal system at family level in the Dorrit universe. For all the altered symbolic power relations, it is clear that the reason behind all of Amy’s acts is her unconditional affection for her father, irrespective of his personal features, foibles, or his social status. The aim of Fanny’s filial affection points beyond his father as a male member of the household: Fanny is interested in what her father can offer as the *head* of the symbolic order. Not surprisingly, Fanny’s love lasts only as long as his father is alive, while Amy’s affection, after William’s death, quickly seeks and finds its target in the father figure of a prospective husband: Arthur Clennam. This seems to be evident by the age-gap between Amy and Arthur, their relationship distinctly revealing that “[w]here appears to be only one source of power, namely, the male, there are actually two, on the male and in the female” (Armstrong, *Desire* 230-31).

Most Dickensian daughter characters embody or imply the possibility of a subverted domestic structure, however, not one of them intends to appropriate the leading (paternal) role in the symbolic order. Nor do they question the authority of the patriarchal ideology and symbolic system that produces the various kinds of ineptitude or incompetence that characterizes most father figures. Dickens obsessively stages scenarios of domestic failure and inversion, yet he refuses to consider the possibility that the system behind these scenarios could be at fault. These novels, thus, bear out Nancy Armstrong’s argument in her account of

well as Thomas Hardy (*Tess of the D’Urbervilles* [1891]), all draw attention to enervated fathers, who are not even able to maintain an outward dignity of patriarchalism such as is referred to by Henry St John Bolingbroke in 1754 (qtd. in Sambrook 110).

¹⁰⁰ Amy may even be regarded as the precursor of the New Woman phenomenon appearing at the end of the nineteenth century (Tosh 152-53). For further arguments, see A. R. Cunningham’s “The ‘New Woman Fiction’ of the 1890’s” (1973) and Gail Cunningham’s *The New Woman in the Victorian Novel* (1978).

Freud's domestic politics, according to which the female [the daughter] is endowed "with the power, paradoxically, to empower the male [the father]. As Freud's archaeological model suggests, the male requires the female to complete him" (Armstrong, *Desire* 230).

Through repeatedly returning to the daughters' presence in the household, Dickens explored the fault-lines of Victorian patriarchy and patriarchal discourse, suggesting that the correction, transformation, and redemption of dysfunctional domestic regimes is possible only due to the benevolent, noncontentious domestic presence of these female figures. Mario Praz notes, concerning Dickens's female characters, that "[Dickens] strove to depict a type of individual who might become a centre for the diffusion of reformist sentiment and might point out the way to a better social order" (143). Praz argues that Dickens "did not, however, conceive this type of individual on a heroic plane in the manner of Carlyle; heroic, superhuman virtues were beyond his Biedermeier range" (143). Concluding his argument, he writes that "it was the simplest and most ordinary kinds of human goodness that he contented himself with displaying in intensified form, in characters created to meet the taste of those who were not professed thinkers and philanthropists" (143).

Amy Dorrit, Louisa Bounderby, Nell Trent, and Florence Dombey are all innocent, *nonheroic* heroines. Still, they all aspire to bring about, in their limited sphere, a kind of transformative cultural improvement, which usually takes the form of the redemption of their (symbolic) fathers. They do so, however, without intending to subvert the fundamental power relations in the symbolic (patriarchal) order, hoping to contribute, at least moderately, to "a better social order" (143).

Conclusion

What stories are new? All types of all characters march through all fables: tremblers and boasters; victims and bullies; dupes and knaves; long-eared Neddies, giving themselves leonine airs; Tartuffes wearing virtuous clothing; lovers and their trials, their blindness, their folly and constancy. With the very first page of the human story do not love and lies too begin?

(William Thackeray, *The Newcomes* 6)

My dissertation has examined the crisis of the Victorian father in his private, and to a certain extent, professional life, through the analysis of the father-daughter relationship in four domestic novels by Charles Dickens. Dickens consistently explores the intrinsic and contingent defects of Victorian fatherhood by staging it through dysfunctional father-daughter dyads, invariably giving center stage to the most vulnerable family member: the daughter. Throughout the dissertation, I felt it necessary to refer to this relationship in a broader literary corpus in order to provide a context for the Dickensian treatment of the domestic crisis and to indicate its difference from the way other writers approached the same issues.

In the Victorian novel, from its beginning, fathers and daughters had existed in a kind of symbiosis which tries, with more or less success, to become a kind of domestic harmony, invariably based, however, on the father's supremacy. Mothers and sons rarely contribute to this domestic set-up—partly on account of their psychological inability, partly due to their physical absence. My four selected novels, in this respect, may be viewed as typically, even archetyp(ic)ally Dickensian. On the other hand, Dickens, and particularly these four novels by him, may even be regarded as condensed and comprehensive nodal points which synthetically represent all the most typical scenarios and occurrences of the father-daughter relationship from the start of the eighteenth century onward, highlighting the problematic nature of this relationship in the light of changing domestic power relations in both society

and the novel during more than two centuries. In the conclusion, a cursory glance at the subsequent developments in the father-daughter relationship will allow us to see Dickens's treatment of this issue from a slightly different perspective.

Domestic fiction published at the turn of the century and in the first two or three decades of the twentieth century still often focuses on the father-daughter relationship. Writers focusing on problematic father-daughter pairs include George Gissing (*The Nether World* [1889], *New Grub Street* [1891], *The Odd Women* [1893]), Joseph Conrad (*Nostromo* [1904], *Chance* [1913]), May Sinclair (*Mary Olivier* [1919], *Life and Death of Harriet Freaan* [1922]), H. G. Wells (*Ann Veronica* [1909]), Arnold Bennett (*Anna of the Five Towns* [1902]), John Galsworthy (*The Forsyte Saga* [1922]), Katherine Mansfield ("The Daughters of the Late Colonel" [1921]), and F. M. Mayor's *The Rector's Daughter* (1924). The fact that the topic had not lost its relevance until the mid-twentieth century is indicated by its centrality in novels like George Orwell's *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) or James Hanley's *The Furrys* (1935).

One crucial change in the situation of patriarchal ideology was the shift in the perception of fatherhood; the transformation, by the early twentieth century, of the Victorian father from a figure of unquestionable authority into a museum exhibit. As Valerie Sanders puts it:

The notion of the father as an enemy to be overcome on the way to adult maturity—though originating in Oedipus's father Laius—is perhaps most typically embodied in the burly person of the Victorian paterfamilias. Victorian fathers have had a long history of being that enemy. They exist in fiction to be escaped, humiliated or vanquished, and in autobiography to represent the attitudes of a past generation. They are the bogeymen of a period that seems to

have experienced more stereotyping than any other, at least as far as the images of the family are concerned. (Sanders 192)

This, however, was not the only significant symbolic process, for, as Sanders says, “[t]he father may have remained formidable, but children themselves were challenging the image [...]” (192). The other most obvious change that affected the father-daughter relationship was the appearance of the rebellious daughter, one of the most typical representatives of the New Woman.¹⁰¹ Dramatic change took place also in the legal status of women after 1870 due to the Married Women’s Property Act (Marcus 204, 207). Until 1870, the wife was considered to be inferior both physically, mentally, and financially to the husband, the husband controlling her whole existence including her assets (Basch 16, 22). The property act, however, altering the woman’s legal position to enable her to possess money (22) may well have fostered rebellion on the woman’s part, in this way, yielding a reinforced presence of the New Woman in British society.

Whereas Victorian daughters in fiction do not intend to weaken their fathers’s symbolic role in domesticity—at least not consciously—the New Woman of *fin-de-siècle* fiction already tends to be consciously iconoclastic, a rebel whose primary aim is to achieve both financial and psychological independence from her father’s domestic ethos, thus, “challeng[ing] existing gender relations and the distribution of power” (Smith-Rosenberg 245). Looking back from this historical perspective, some of Dickens’s heroines might be said to already manifest the desire to reject the unnecessary burdens of Victorian patriarchy—such as an incompetent yet authoritarian father figure—but this endeavor never meant to overthrow

¹⁰¹ For discussions of the New Woman phenomenon, see Sarah Grand’s “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” (1894), 271, 273; Hugh E. M. Stutfield’s “The Psychology of Feminism” (1897), 105, 115; Lyn Pykett’s *The ‘Improper’ Feminine: The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (1992), 140; Ann Heilmann’s *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (2000), 39, 82; and Angelique Richardson’s “The Birth of National Hygiene and Efficiency: Women and Eugenics in Britain and America 1865-1915” (2004), 243.

the patriarchal domestic order and its ethos. By contrast, the New Woman in fiction, in general, wishes to rid herself of her father, and/or the paternal discourse her father—and frequently her mother—so vigorously represents. At the same time, the more or less wealthy father is prone to assert his authority over his daughter by taking advantage of her financial dependence on him, which may well initiate a series of disobedient acts on the daughter's part leading to an unavoidable rupture between them. If the daughter cannot have transforming beneficial effects on the attitude of the *paterfamilias*, her only option seems to be that of leaving the paternal house for good, as is already seen in the four Dickens novels investigated above: Florence Dombey (marriage), Louisa Gradgrind (working as a governess), Nell Trent (death), and Amy Dorrit (marriage).

Some Edwardian novels provide a kind of paternal ideological explanation (Bennett) and a solution (Conrad) for the ongoing domestic crisis of paternity—a solution, at least, from the daughter's viewpoint.

At the outset of his literary career, Arnold Bennett worked as the assistant editor, later on as the editor, of a late-Victorian women's magazine called *Woman* (De Stasio 40), which certainly left its mark on the themes of his fiction.¹⁰² According to Margaret Drabble, the experience Bennett gained through editing this magazine “was not wasted, for Bennett is one of the few novelists who can write with sympathy and detail about the domestic preoccupations of women” (56), as can be observed in his short novel, *Anna of the Five Towns*, written and published during his editorship. In the center of this book, there is an uneasy triangular relationship of two oppressed daughters (Anna and Agnes Tellwright) and a tyrannical father (Ephraim Tellwright). The uneasy nature of the father-daughter relationships

¹⁰² De Stasio notes that the magazine “*Woman* was a one-penny weekly, which had started in 1890 as a moderate feminist paper—its motto being ‘Forward! But Not Too Fast’—with occasional contributions from notable feminists” adding that “[w]hen Bennett took up the editorship, he set out to improve the standard of the paper” contributing with “personal interview[s]: outstanding women, most of them novelists, were interviewed in their homes in order to show them in their two roles as women and as writers” (40, 42).

is intensified after the mother's death, in fact, the death of both mothers, since Anna and Agnes come from different female parents, both being already dead at the outset of the plot.

What makes this novel significant for the purposes of the present dissertation is its awareness of the wide implications of patriarchal domesticity. Following a painfully disturbing dialogue between Anna and her father, which ends a chapter, the next section begins with the following paragraph:

This surly and terrorising ferocity of Tellwright's was as instinctive as the growl and spring of a beast of prey. He never considered his attitude towards the women of his household as an unusual phenomenon which needed justification, or as being in the least abnormal. The women of a household were the natural victims of their master: in his experience it had always been so. In his experience the master had always, by universal consent, possessed certain rights over the self-respect, the happiness and the peace of the defenceless souls set under him—rights as unquestioned as those exercised by Ivan the Terrible. Such rights were rooted in the secret nature of things. It was futile to discuss them, because their necessity and their propriety were equally obvious. (Bennet, *Anna* 65)¹⁰³

This kind of deep-rooted tyranny is laconically justified with the simple comment on Ephraim Tellwright's behavior: "He did as his father and uncles had done" (65). The narrator adds that Mr Tellwright "belonged to the great and powerful class of house-tyrants, the backbone of the

¹⁰³ This quotation confirms the insight of Howard Jacobson's ambiguous maxim as if it were aimed at (rebellious) daughters as a piece of concealed advice: "You can't manage without the *idea* of a father," notably as "[t]he idea of a father, especially the idea of rejecting a father, powers the modern world" (6, italics in the original).

British nation” (Bennet, *Anna* 65), whose behavior is that of a country’s despotic ruler:

If you had talked to him of the domestic graces of life, your words would have conveyed to him no meaning. If you had indicted him for simple unprovoked rudeness, he would have grinned, well knowing that, as the King can do no wrong, so a man cannot be rude in his own house. If you had told him that he inflicted purposeless misery not only on others but on himself, he would have grinned again, vaguely aware that he had not tried to be happy, and rather despising happiness as a sort of childish gewgaw. (65)

Anna Tellwright’s father is scarcely worse than the father in Wells’s *Ann Veronica*, who showed his daughter “so clearly that the womenkind he was persuaded he had to protect and control could please him in one way, and in one way only, and that was by doing nothing except the punctual domestic duties and being nothing except restful experiences” (475), or Georgio Viola, “the old Spartan” (Conrad, *Nostromo* 547), whose “severity of [...] temper, his advancing age, his absorption in his memories [...] prevented his taking much notice” of his daughters (271).

These fathers live the unconquerable desire to possess the daughter (as a property), from the very moment of her birth, as is seen through property-obsessed Soames Forsyte’s emotional though ambiguous sentences: “ ‘Fleur,’ repeated Soames: ‘Fleur! we’ll call her that.’ The sense of triumph and renewed possession swelled within him. By God! this—this thing was *his!*” (Galsworthy, *The Forsyte Saga* 499, italics in the original). It is even more astonishing when the absent dead father still can suggest his presence, thus securing his daughters mentally as his personal properties, as in Katherine Mansfield’s *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*: “Josephine could only glare. She had the most extraordinary feeling that she

had just escaped something simply awful. But how could she explain to Constantia that father was in the chest of drawers? [...] He was watching there, hidden away—just behind the door handle—ready to spring” (Mansfield, *Daughters* 7). The same spectral paternity makes itself felt in May Sinclair’s *Life and Death of Harriett Frean*, where even the widow feels compelled to stay physically close to the dead father: “She could see that Mamma [...] wanted the cottage at Hampstead [...]. After all that was the way to keep near to Papa, to go on doing the things they had done together. Her mother agreed that it was the way. ‘I can’t help feeling,’ Harriett said, ‘it’s what he would have wished’ ” (96).

The chief difference between Dickens’s treatment of the father-daughter relationship and these early 20th-century novels is that, in the fiction of Bennett, Wells, and especially Sinclair, the Victorian father is an anachronism—a spectral presence: dead but still exerting considerable influence. In *Anna of the Five Towns*, for instance, Mr Tellwright knows that the domestic ambience surrounding him is far from being ideal—not even for him. The narrator reveals that Mr Tellwright, notwithstanding the ironically essential male attribute to which his name alludes, “had, in fact, never been happy at home: he had never known that expansion of the spirit which is called joy; he existed continually under a grievance. The atmosphere of Manor Terrace afflicted him, too, with a melancholy gloom—him, who had created it” (65). The father’s deficient emotional intelligence is also highlighted: “Had he been capable of self-analysis, he would have discovered that his heart lightened whenever he left the house, and grew dark whenever he returned [...]” (65).

The domestic atmosphere could hardly be called lighter in Orwell’s *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, where the ghost of the Victorian patriarch still haunts the household. The father, the Reverend Charles Hare, a Victorian fossil of a patriarch, acts as the ultimate guarantee against the disruption of the family: “Probably no one who had ever spoken to the Rector for as long as ten minutes would have denied that he was a ‘difficult’ kind of man. [...] [H]e was

an anachronism. He ought never to have been born into the modern world; its whole atmosphere disgusted and infuriated him” (Orwell, *Clergyman’s Daughter* 264). The narrator explains that, in earlier centuries, this father could have led a harmonious domestic life, and if, at least, he did not suffer from financial problems in the present, he could still be “shutting the twentieth century out of his consciousness.” However, “[t]he Rector, tethered by his poverty to the age of Lenin and the *Daily Mail*, was kept in a state of chronic exasperation which it was only natural that he should work off on the person nearest to him—usually, that is, on Dorothy” (264).

Dorothy, the only child of the Rector, lives under constant psychological oppression at home, practically as a domestic servant. In addition, she suffers from unbearable compunction stemming partly from the supposed neglect of her religious duties, partly from her failure to “guard against irreverence and sacrilegious thoughts” (259). During church services, she secretly tries to atone for her (paternally defined) inadequacies by masochistically hurting herself: “She made it a rule, whenever she caught herself not attending to her prayers, to prick her arm hard enough to make blood come” (259). The only way for her to get rid of her life is to physically/mentally break away from her father (i.e., his ethos), which step later will irrevocably alter their abnormal relationship. Dorothy, seemingly against her will, becomes a new woman by leaving the paternal house.

As is seen in the early twentieth-century novel, the only plausible solution for an adult daughter to become free from her symbolic prison seems to be a literal escape from the paternal house, provided she can identify herself with the injunction in Joseph Conrad’s *Chance* (1913): “a woman holds an absolute right—or possesses a perfect excuse—to escape in her own way from a man-mismanaged world” (170), not forgetting that “[a] woman against the world has no resources but in herself. Her only means of action is to be what *she is*” (174, italics in the original). This self-supporting female strategy can already be seen in George

Gissing's novel, *The Odd Women* (1893), through Rhoda Nunn, whose purpose in life is to teach unmarried (i.e., odd) women how to achieve self-respect in society—similarly to her own example (157-58).

A conversation with Mary Barfoot, a woman with similar ethos to Rhoda, reveals Rhoda's views of the *fin-de-siècle* women, underlying both of their higher calling in life, "[t]here's one advantage in being a woman. A woman with brains and will may hope to distinguish herself in the greatest movement of our time—that of emancipating her sex" (245). This declaration by Rhoda prompts Miss Barfoot to define the dimension of their social mission in the following way: "You are right. It's better to be a woman, in our day. With us is all the joy of advance, the glory of conquering. Men have only material progress to think about. But we—we are winning souls, propagating a new religion, purifying the earth! [...] Thank heaven we are women!" (246). Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot are brave enough not only to act independently from their fathers but also to proclaim what they think of their society and their own crucial position in it.

Gissing's novel may well be seen as a bridge connecting Dickens and those early twentieth-century writers that are concerned with the problematic social status of women, or, as Karen Chase points out, "Gissing was situated in such a fashion, situated historically, economically, personally, that he was able to raise new possibilities for the Victorian heroine, in particular, new rhetorical possibilities that reflect changes in the condition of women at the end of the nineteenth century" (231). Thus, if the acts of such Dickensian heroines as Florence Dombey, Louisa Gradgrind, Little Nell, and Little Dorrit seem to be at the beginning of a symbolic emancipation proclamation of women concerning patriarchal power, the acts of Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot probably constitute the end of it.

However, the influence of Victorian novelists, primarily that of Dickens, on British fiction does not end with the *fin-de-siècle* or modernism. Writers have continued to be

fascinated by Victorian life; in fact a renewed interest in Victorian culture was one of the most conspicuous products of the cultural turn in criticism. What is frequently referred to as neo-Victorian fiction is closely related to the critical rediscovery of Victorianism, focusing on those issues that tended to remain unsaid in nineteenth-century Britain.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Concerning the origins and features of the Neo-Victorian genre, see, for instance, Mark Llewellyn's "What is Neo-Victorian Studies?" (2008), 175; Cheryl A. Wilson's "(Neo-)Victorian Fatigue: Getting Tired of the Victorians in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*" (2008), 21-23; and Andrea Kirchknopf's "(Re-)Workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Definitions, Terminology, Contexts" (2008), 63.

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Registry number:
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PhD Publikációs Lista

Candidate: Rudolf Nyári

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List of publications related to the dissertation

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In: English Language and Literatures in English 2016. Ed.: Borbély Julianna, L'Harmattan
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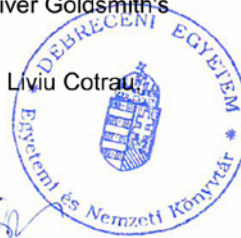
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The Candidate's publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of Web of Science, Scopus and Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) databases.

10 September, 2018