

***REDEMPTION AND INHERITANCE, FROM BLEAK HOUSE TO GREAT
EXPECTATIONS***

by

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This thesis explores themes of inheritance and redemption through motifs of baptism and apocalypse in two of Charles Dickens's late works: *Bleak House* (1852) and *Great Expectations* (1861). It does so with the specific understanding that the construction of spaces and identities in time are there complexly interdependent entities whose configurations are constitutive of each novel's narrative fabric. In other words, the spatial construction of each entity (space/place, identity) in relation to time is integral to its interpretation.

In *Bleak House*, the primary motif is that of apocalypse – a motif chiefly concerned with institutional spaces. *Great Expectations*, conversely, focuses on individual redemption with motifs of baptism. In each of these novels do orphans narrate retroactively their own experiences; in each narrative are the violences perpetrated by parents on children (be they adoptive, biological, or any other variety) foregrounded in Dickens's social critique. And it is through baptism and apocalypse respectively that such violences are remedied, and inheritance erased.

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PREFACE

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To those about to embark on a reading on my work, I wish you luck and fortitude. I hope you enjoy what you discover hereafter.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Due in equal measure to technological advances and “his obsession with his work,” was Victorian author Charles Dickens able to reach an unprecedented number of people over whom he held an emotional influence “to an extent never equaled” (Cody “Dickens’s Popularity”). Indeed, “it has been estimated that one out of ten Britons who could read read his works, and then read them aloud to many others” (“Dickens’s Popularity”). Of course, Dickens very well saw himself as the “beloved friend and moral teacher of his ‘dear reader’” (Lewis 1-2) and engaged in a well-known “love affair” with the public (Cody “Dickens’s Popularity”). Because of this emotional influence over the Victorian period as well as the staunch popularity of his realist works in the intervening years, the following study takes Charles Dickens as its subject. More specifically, it takes up two of Dickens’s later works: *Bleak House* (1852-3) and *Great Expectations* (1861), both novels deeply troubled over notions of inheritance and whose principle narrators are orphaned children.

The central thread of the complex tapestry that constitutes *Bleak House*’s narration is that of the Chancery Court case Jarndyce v. Jarndyce. This case is an interfamilial struggle over the inheritance of a great deal of money, and it is a case whose seemingly unending litigation is often compared to the Final Judgment of the Book of Revelation. This, of course, sets the stage for the added fraught notions of inheritance which plague the characters in the resulting narrative

threads. Indeed, compounding this first charged inheritance is the repeated allusion to Exodus 20:5:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.

This threat – to punish “the children for the sin of the parents” – is a persistent anxiety in Dickens’s works, which are “obsessed with the violence done by fathers to sons, [and] by the past to the present” (Michasiw 577). Notably, and in a complimentary manner to *Bleak House*, does Dickens’s thirteenth novel, *Great Expectations* incorporate this anxiety, asking questions of inheritance, sin, and redemption.

Like *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations* is retrospectively narrated by an orphan, Pip, who is “brought up by hand” by an abusive female relative. However, Pip desires (or learns to desire) to live as a gentleman and marry Estella, the adopted daughter of the equally abusive and fabulously wealthy Miss Havisham. With these, his titular “great expectations,” Pip comes into a great deal of money by way of the convict Magwitch, who himself takes Pip for an adopted son. *Bleak House*, by contrast, is a novel in which its orphaned retrospective narrator, Esther, makes no great pretensions, but instead introduces herself as being “not very clever” and begs the reader’s patience (73). In fact, it is this modesty which characterizes Esther so greatly, as well as her role as the “angel of the household,” in both *Bleak Houses*, between which she is the common element (besides name). She herself comes under the guardianship of an idealized Christian man, John Jarndyce, who resolutely refuses to involve himself with the Chancery case that bears his name – a habit in which Esther follows suit.

It is this divorce from all things Chancery – that is, from all the fraught notions of inheritance which it embodies – that enables the domestic bliss of the original Bleak House. Though it cannot rid itself completely of the taint of Chancery (Richard still falls prey to it while under its roof, for example), this necessitates the creation of the second Bleak House, a space whose history is free of such tragedies. This recreation of the site of domestic bliss is the realization of the apocalyptic vision of *Bleak House*, whose profound anxieties concerning inheritance are embodied in the case Jarndyce v. Jarndyce.

Great Expectations, while similarly concerned with inheritance, presents an opposing problem of inheritance in that its chief evil action is a sudden financial windfall, as opposed to a protracted financial abeyance. This money proves only a temporary and corrupting force for Pip, an added confusion to his already deeply confused identity. Following a series of painful rejections and disappointments while attempting to realize his “great expectations,” Pip only becomes reconciled to various “foster parents” (Havisham, Magwitch, Joe) through a disavowal of his great expectations and a series of redemptive acts. And it is only after this reconciliation that Pip can realize what ought properly to have been his “expectations” from the start: an honest living and the potential for a family. This is a shift of desire, from wealth and Estella to desiring the care of his “adoptive” son of his same name.

More broadly, *Great Expectations* explores the effects of parents – foster, adopted or otherwise – on their children, and on material and emotional inheritances as well as biological ones. It is a novel of education, a *bildungsroman*, which charts the growth of Pip from a young boy crying alone in the churchyard where his family is buried to his adult life, both as a failed and morally corrupt ‘gentleman’ and as a penitent, working-class man of business. It charts not only Pip’s moral failings and redemption, but the moral failings and redemption of the two chief

adoptive parents in the novel, Havisham and Magwitch. Through their adopted children, each of these parents attempts vicarious, specifically material redemption – and each achieves a moment of divine redemption through baptism after the true realization of their sins. While Havisham discovers the extent of her mistreatment of Estella, and through her, Pip, Magwitch learns to forgive his greatest enemy.

Ultimately, *Great Expectations*, like *Bleak House*, comes down to questions of family and the negotiation of the family unit and its relationship to moral corruption becomes mapped, in both novels, onto various spatial locations. Indeed, it is the materiality of these spaces, as well as the accessibility of the past to the present, which constitute the “sedimented designs” (Scholz 155; qtd. in Bemong and Borghart 4) of meaning in each work. This much is in keeping with Dickens’s own artistic vision, as he himself wrote to Wilkie Collins from his residence on Gad’s Hill, where he wrote *Great Expectations*:

I think the business of art is to lay all that ground carefully, not with the care that conceals itself – to show, by a backward light, what everything has been working to – but only to *suggest*, until the fulfilment comes. These are the ways of Providence, of which ways all art is but a little imitation (Dickens qtd. in Johnson “Four. Narrative Art”).¹

It is in this sense which the forthcoming pages examine these two novels. That is, these novels are works which “*suggest*, until the fulfilment comes,” working as “the ways of Providence” do to illuminate the nebulous relationships of inheritance to redemption and absolution, relationships which work in each novel towards cosmic resolution.

¹ This is referenced in part by John Cunningham in his essay “Christian Allusion, Comedic Structure, and the Metaphor of Baptism in *Great Expectations*,” but is here quoted in full from E.D.H Johnson’s *Charles Dickens: An Introduction to His Novels*.

2.0 NEARING JUDGEMENT IN *BLEAK HOUSE*

“...it is the old age of the world which at length understands its childhood,”
– Benjamin Jowett, *Essays and Reviews*, 1860

Bleak House, as E.D.H Johnson writes, is “in many ways the masterpiece of Dickens’ narrative art,” as it was “the first to posit a completely organic view of society,” where “scenes are discontinuous, spatially related in shifting patterns that create a kaleidoscopic effect,” while “the action advances by a process of episodic intensification” (“Four. Narrative Art” 100). For Dickens, “form and meaning do not organically coalesce,” but are instead “related through a process of deliberate and overt manipulation” (84). The “narrative art” of Dickens, for *Bleak House*, is an art which deliberately and patiently threads these “organic” scenes into a “spatially related... kaleidoscopic,” labyrinthine whole. While the “scenes are discontinuous” they are joined together in a manner which speaks them into meaning. As “the action advances by a process of episodic intensification,” in each of these narrative threads, it is their inorganic fusion by which Dickens contrives meaning, through his “process of deliberate and overt manipulation” (84).

For *Bleak House*, the central figure around which all these narrative threads of *Bleak House* coalesce is the Court of Chancery, an archaic institution with its roots in the early Norman period (Marsh 2-6). It is this central, putrefying institution that characterizes a novel rife with them. Chancery, as we are first introduced to it, is steeped in ahistorical, mythological time,

surrounded by fresh mud “as if the waters [from the Great Flood] had but newly retired from the face of the earth” (*Bleak House* 61). Over this mud treads the Megalosaurus, whom it “would not be wonderful to meet... forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard on Holborn-hill” (61). Likewise is the light drizzle mixed with the industrial soot of the city said to have “gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun,” in reference to Pierre-Simon Laplace who predicted, as Patrician Ingham notes, the collapse of the solar system through the cooling of the sun in “a nineteenth-century version of climate change” (61). This is a scene which introduces “an eternal perspective that includes but extends beyond social analysis,” and presents “an antigenesis regressing in time... mov[ing] backward from flood to fall to creation,” according to Janet Larson (135). Chancery exists outside of time; its linear progression has become confused and the entirety of past moments become congealed, immediately accessible to an elongated present.

These moments seem to collect like the mud on the pavement outside Chancery, where “a general infection of ill-temper,” hangs in the air, mixing with the intemperate fog. It is here where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since day broke (if the day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest (*Bleak House* 61).

Those who clamber outside, going about their business, can seemingly never escape the ghastly, foggy condition which seems to emanate from Chancery; they too scramble about in a time outside of time. As “most of the shops lighted two hours before their time” – the fog of Chancery, it seems, has plunged the whole of London (and, indeed, the whole of England) into a premature night – the passage of time only apparent in the ever-rising crusts of mud which

obstruct their path. And no one is free from the darkness that “rolls defiled,” like fog, over the whole of the country, though it is these same multitudes which are the people for whom Chancery was designed. We meet them, now, bogged down in every way by its pollution. It is this image which best characterizes the impact of Chancery on not only its suitors, but the world at large. Indeed, the fog that stems from Chancery seems to carry not only evil but the unique atemporality which constitutes that institution, obscuring the most basic time-keeping device accessible to those “tens of thousands,” the sun.

Chancery was an institution designed to bring justice and has now lived long enough to become the “most pestilent of hoary sinners” (*Bleak House* 62). Chancery is at the very (black, rotting) heart of the novel’s evils, and is the height of aristocratic wastefulness and burden as well as a drain on human resources of both wealth and sanity. As Miss Flite intones:

When the leaves are falling from the trees, and there are no more flowers in bloom to make up into nosegays for the Lord Chancellor’s court... the vacation is fulfilled; and the sixth seal, mentioned in the Revelations, again prevails (PG).

Here, the sixth seal of the apocalypse remains resolutely unopened as “the vacation is fulfilled,” meaning that Miss Flite has yet to receive judgment, though she expects it “shortly.” Nonetheless does she “make up into nosegays for the Lord Chancellor’s court” of these transient entities the flowers while awaiting the triumph of her judgment over the sixth seal. She passes the seasons, from fall to spring to summer, in wait of this judgment, all the while maintaining some twenty small birds “with the intention of restoring them to liberty. When my judgment should be given... the whole collection” however, having “died over and over again,” as “their lives, poor silly things, are so short in comparison with Chancery proceedings” (106). Likewise, of course, are the lives of humans – certainly this is the case with the suicide of Tom Jarndyce.

For both Tom Jarndyce and Miss Flite, and many others in their predicament, does the status of “nearing judgment” seem to stand in equally for a relationship to death and the afterlife as it does the actual judgment of a case in Chancery: “‘For,’ he [Tom Jarndyce] says, ‘Krook, I am much depressed; my case is on again, and I think I’m nearer Judgment than ever I was’” (*Bleak House* 105). As Patricia Ingham notes, this is an “ironic pun on ‘Judgment,’” which “appears to refer to a settlement in the Chancery suit but for him alludes to divine judgment as he intends to commit suicide” (105). Here, as in the case of Miss Flite, it becomes clear the true “death sentence” it was to fall prey to a suit in Chancery, the way Richard Carstone does; for equally as such characters reference their awaiting judgment in the sense of their Chancery suit, do they reference the final Judgment of revelation and their own personal judgment through death.

Chancery, in the case of such characters, as well as in the novel more broadly, is at the heart of *Bleak House*’s apocalyptic vision as it is the heart of the social evil of the novel. In the following section, I will show the significance of this apocalyptic message as it underpins conflicts over inheritance specifically, which are mapped onto a variety of landscapes. Then I will discuss the narrative structure of *Bleak House* as it scaffolds and elucidates these relationships and landscapes, as well as how it underpins Dickens’s ultimate gestures at cosmic resolution in the realization of this vision.

2.1 CHESNEY WOLD

“Fairy-land to visit, but a desert to live in.” – *Bleak House*, Chapter II, “In Fashion.”

It is the biblical floodwaters which have recently retreated from Chancery which are “threatening to engulf Chesney Wold, the seat of the aristocratic Dedlock family” (Axton 345); it is a biblical deluge whose “rain is ever falling, drip, drip, drip, by day and night, upon the broad-flagged terrace-pavement” (Dickens *Bleak House* 127), soaking through the very trees, dulling the life of the living as it drenches that unusual, supernatural terrace of the estate which “has been called, from the old time, the Ghost’s Walk” (68)². The Ghost’s Walk is the haunting reminder to the ossifying, aristocratic Dedlocks of the foundations of the British Commonwealth in the English Civil War not two hundred years hence in Dickens’s time, an event which may have struck the aging death blow to the British aristocracy, which nonetheless has persisted to the twenty-first century.

The Ghost is that of the late Lady Dedlock, who “had none of the family blood in her veins, [and] favored the bad cause” of the Cromwellians (*Bleak House* 127). Her husband, the late Sir Morbury Dedlock, was of the side of “the blessed martyr” Charles I. The Lady Dedlock performed several acts of sabotage against her husband and his cause, including the laming of horses meant to ride in battle. Caught in this act by her husband, she is herself lamed, walking for the remainder of her life with a “halting step” (128) upon that same terrace at Chesney Wold. It is there where she eventually dies, using her last breath to curse the Dedlock family:

I will die here, where I have walked. And I will walk here, though I am in my grave. I will walk here, until the pride of this house is humbled. And when calamity, or when disgrace is coming to it, let the Dedlocks listen for my step! (128).

² The two passages quoted here in part, from the first and seventh chapters respectively, are almost complete copies of one another. The passage from VII is quoted almost in full, the passage from chapter I is as follows: “the heavy drops fall, drip, drip, drip, upon the broad flagged pavement, called, from old time, the Ghost’s Walk” (68).

This story of the Ghost's Walk is never told to casual visitors but is conferred only upon those whose discretion can be trusted – and, perhaps for this reason, it is almost forgotten and shrouded in secrecy (133).

The home of the Dedlocks at Chesney Wold seems to have died along with the late Lady Dedlock. Or, at least, Chesney Wold seems a place that is no longer wholly alive; the courtyards are barren, and only the animals remember a time when the weather was anything other than rain. They now pass the “long wet hours... in livelier communication than is held in the servants' hall, or at the Dedlock Arms” (*Bleak House* 127-8). Chesney Wold is the product of a bygone era that it now stands monument to, and it is the very life of this era that is made material through the Ghost's Walk. Like Chancery, Chesney Wold is a place that exists in tenuous relationship to the outside world, a place whose temporal progression digresses from the linear into the disorderly, the present and past becoming equally accessible.

This is illustrated best by the “fashionable intelligence” which charts the movements of Lady Dedlock. This fashionable intelligence, “like the fiend, is omniscient of the past and present” (68-9), keeping careful watch over the aristocratic world, which is “not a large one,” and “not so unlike the Court of Chancery, that we may pass from one scene to the other, as the crow flies” (67). Indeed, Chancery is cut from the same cloth of that aristocratic structure, even as it was meant to serve the needs of common people. Yet, each of these are a world unto themselves; the world of the aristocrats, however, being only a “little speck” with “its appointed place,” whose evil can be found in its folds of costumed tradition. “It is a world,” Dickens writes, “wrapped up in much jeweler's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun” (67). As the Court of Chancery is atemporal and omnipresent, so the world of fashion drifts slowly away from the world in the

same fog that seeps from the court. It is a world “deadened... whose growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air” (61).

Of course, there are many underworlds beneath this shining world of the aristocratic, fashionable intelligence at Chesney Wold and secular judgment at Chancery. Among them are the Tom-All-Alones, a place to which the narrator turns upon the breakdown of the mechanism of the fashionable intelligence as it loses track of its “restless, very restless,” monarch, Lady Dedlock, who now outpaces “even Sir Leicester’s gallantry,” in her boredom (*Bleak House* 237). In the shadow of Lady Dedlock’s extreme restlessness and Sir Leicester’s being bedridden³, that we are introduced to these Tom-All-Alones. We pass from the sight of aristocratic homes and government institutions, “wrapped up in much jeweler’s cotton and fine wool” (67) and are greeted with the sight of abject poverty and a kind of bed-ridden misery foreign to those who inhabit the upper spheres of this world, even when they themselves are bed-ridden.

³ With gout, described as “a troublesome demon... of the patrician order” which “communicates something exclusive, even to the levelling process of dying” (327). While Sir Leicester deems such spells “a liberty taken somewhere,” he deems it likewise something to which “we have all yielded... it belongs to us [the Dedlocks]; it has, for some hundreds of years, been understood that we are not to make the vaults in the park interesting on more ignoble terms; and I submit myself to the compromise” (238). Here, the aristocratic familial disease of Gout is itself a compromise with death – this mirrors other comments of Sir Leicester’s, as will be discussed later, that while “he would on the whole admit Nature to be a good idea (a little low, perhaps, when not enclosed with a park-fence), but an idea dependent for its execution on your great county families” (68). Here, even the inhabitants of such worlds as the aristocratic seem to hold false notions of their authority over the reality of such elements as time, nature and death; notions which are resolutely rejected by the end of the novel, through the seeming final collapse of the Dedlocks (through the death of both Lady and Sir Leicester Dedlock with none to carry on the family) as well as the judgement of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* in Chancery. This is a case in which Lady Dedlock was party, the “interminable” nature of which Sir Leicester “has no objection to,” as “it is a slow, expensive, British, constitutional kind of thing” (71). More specifically, “he regards the Court of Chancery, even if it should involve an occasional delay of justice and a trifling amount of confusion, as something, devised in conjunction with a variety of other somethings, by the perfection of human wisdom, for the eternal settlement (humanly speaking) of every thing. And he is upon the whole of a fixed opinion, that to give the sanction of his countenance to any complaints respecting it, would be to encourage some person in the lower classes to rise up somewhere – like Wat Tyler” (72). Of course, it is the children and grandchildren of Rouncewell, whose names evoke Wat Tyler and the inventor James Watt, who uphold the establishment of Chesney Wold at the end of the novel, in aid of the ailing Sir Leicester and following the death of Lady Dedlock.

In the realm of the Tom-All-Alones, we follow the destitute orphan Jo who is equally as ignorant of his connection to the Dedlocks as he is of the Lord's Prayer. Yet, this very relationship, as Patricia Ingham notes, is "one of many references to the parable of the rich glutton and the sore-covered beggar" the "great gulf" between whom will be "reversed on the Day of Judgment when the rich man in Hell will beg Lazarus, who is safe in heaven, for water" (238n3). This passage characterizes the relationship between the aristocratic world and the Tom-All-Alones more broadly as well, and is brought to our attention through the commentary of the extradiegetic narrator:

What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step? What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together! (238).

Of course, this is only one of many passages in which the final judgment is anticipated, as has been frequently noted. As Linda Lewis writes, the text of *Bleak House* is rife with judgments, each functioning as an allusion to that final Judgment which is at the heart of the Christian Apocalypse (120). Among other things, Dickens – his narrators and his characters – pass judgment upon "neglect of the poor, unmet sanitation needs, the 'philanthropy' of single-minded missionaries, and perversions of the legal system," as Chancery itself epitomizes (120). It is biblical judgment, in *Bleak House*, which is paramount and that secular institution of judgment, Chancery, which is a corruption of its divine counterpart. What the characters await is a more perfect system of divinely-ordained judgment, quoting

Old Testament law that exacts punishment to the third and fourth generation (Exod. 20:5), warn[ing] sinners to prepare for the Day of Judgment, and judg[ing] one another (rightly or wrongly) (Lewis 120).

In seeking personal justice characters become “defendants” and subject to the judgments of “self, society, the law, and one another” (120). It is these judgments which prove lethal in the case of Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon, and which are defied by their illegitimate daughter, Esther Summerson.

The refuse of this broken-down system of judgment collect in that “dirty hanger-on and disowned relation of the law” (102), Krook’s dark and decaying shop “Chancery.” Krook, of course, is likewise nicknamed the Chancellor, as Ingham notes, for the “human misery” his shop causes “when some of his documents bring disaster to Lady Dedlock.” Meanwhile, his shop earns the name Chancery “as it is based on ruins of the past” (103). And it is also here where the lives of two forgotten by the legal and social systems likewise await their demise, themselves examples of such “human misery,” caused by the original Chancery. It is here where Miss Flite lives, imagining Chancery in competition with the sixth seal of revelation to dispense her judgment (101), and it is here where Captain Hawdon, Esther’s father, lives as Nemo until his eventual suicide by overdose. In looking at the documents displayed (or splayed) around, Esther herself comments that

Some of the inscriptions I have enumerated were written in law-hand, like the papers I had seen in Kenge and Carboy’s office, *and the letters I had so long received from the firm. Among them was one, in the same writing*, having nothing to do with the business of the shop, but announcing that a respectable man, aged forty-five wanted engrossing, or

copying to execute with neatness and dispatch: address to Nemo, care of Mr. Krook within (102; emphasis added).

Here, the legal representations of Esther's legal status as an orphan are authored by her father in disguise as Nemo, or "no one." As she comments, the advertisement that Captain Hawdon "wanted engrossing" is written in the same hand of "the letters I had so long received from the firm." While this might have simply referenced legal writing more generally, we know that the "law hand" of Captain Hawdon is "not quite" law-hand, as Tulkinghorn observes. Rather, he says that "probably... the legal character it has, was acquired after the original hand was formed" (71).

As Daniel Hack writes, this is one of the most characteristic aspects of Dickens's fiction, to be so contingent upon "references to the presence, creation, appearance, physical features, and sheer tangibility of marked, written, printed, and inscribed surfaces of objects" (37). *Bleak House*, he continues, is itself the most "varied and sustained engagement," of these "inscribed surfaces of objects," the novel itself being characterized as "a document about the materiality of documents and the interpretation of that materiality" (38). Such materiality of documents – particularly handwritten ones, as Hawdon's are – are crucial not only to the movements of plot, but the essence of the narrative itself. Particularly, the document which catches Lady Dedlock's notice is one full of "legal repetitions and prolixities," which Sir Leicester takes to be "ranging among the national bulwarks" (*Bleak House* 72) while at the same time, it is this letter which begins the downward trajectory of Lady Dedlock. It is through this letter that she discovers that her former fiancée, Captain Hawdon, who she believed to have died, has, in fact, lived on; once she discovers this, she discovers also that their child has lived on to adulthood in the form of Esther Summerson. The continued life of both Captain Hawdon and Esther Summerson – their

resurrection into her life – likewise resurrect, or make material and immediate, her dreadful secret.

It is in this way that the material workings of the case Jarndyce v. Jarndyce, as the center of the narrative, become the site of a collapsing of the distance between the subsequent worlds of Lady Dedlock/Chesney Wold and Bleak House/Esther Summerson. Put another way, it is this legal dispute over inheritance, and its abundantly wasteful practices that instigate the movements of the plot which threaten to expose Lady Dedlock's secret. Those movements of plot which bring the family to this semblance of a reunion is the direct result of a dispute over inheritance; and it is the inheritance of this very secret which Esther Summerson and her mother must absolve themselves of. Of course, Lady Dedlock does not accomplish this, committing suicide in desperation.

Lady Dedlock is condemned for the “sexual sin” which Esther herself embodies. However, what Lady Dedlock suffers is an internalization of social condemnation as opposed to divine condemnation. As Linda Lewis writes:

Taught by the same teachers as her sister... [Lady Dedlock] awaits the Second Coming prophesied in Mark 13:24-33 and believes that this Judgment will be punitive, not forgiving. Lady Dedlock's doubt in God's willingness or ability to extend grace so far as to include a woman taken in sexual sin is typical of Dickens's 'fallen women' (130).

These teachings, in *Lady Dedlock*, when internalized become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In her desperation, believing herself past “God's willingness or ability to extend grace,” she commits suicide, dying on the grave of Captain Hawdon without making confession of her sins.

This grim end is foreshadowed by the extradiegetic narrator, who observes that “if she [the Lady] could be translated to heaven to-morrow, she might be expected to ascend without any rapture.” Similarly, is she remarked to be a woman “with all her perfections on her head” (69), evoking the ghost of Hamlet’s father come back from purgatory for the night to tell his son of his murder – she, like he, would die “with all [her] imperfections on [her] head” (I.v.79, qtd. in *Bleak House* 69n1). Notably, it is not the woman taken in sexual sin to which Lady Dedlock is likened, Queen Gertrude, but the murdered and betrayed King, Hamlet Sr. Rather, Hamlet Sr.’s “love was of that dignity” for his wife, whose incestuous second marriage may be better characterized as sinful. Yet even then does the ghost of Hamlet Sr. beseech his son to “leave her to heaven” (I.v.86).

And this allusion to Hamlet is not the only instance of foreshadowing in our introduction to Lady Dedlock. Even as she is described as childless (as is, in a sense, true) she is referenced by a nursery rhyme as we return to scenes of Chesney Wold in her absence, and this after being introduced to Esther, who we later discover to be her daughter – a woman likewise referred to as “Dame Durden” and “Mother Hubbard.” Concerning Lady Dedlock, we return to the saturated scene at Chesney Wold, where the animals wait with only the presence of Mrs. Rouncewell:

So with the dogs in the kennel-buildings across the park, who have their restless fits, and whose doleful voices, when the wind has been very obstinate, have even made it known in the house itself: up stairs, down stairs, and in my lady’s chamber (*Bleak House* 128).

This is, as Patricia Ingham suggests, a borrowing of the “mocking lines from a nursery rhyme suggesting a focus on Lady Dedlock” (128n1). *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* records this rhyme as “more than usually subject to divisions and additions” (224). The following was recorded in a child’s nursery rhyme book during the mid-Victorian period:

Goosey Goosey Gander where shall we wander
Up stairs and down stairs and in my Lady's chamber
Old father long legs will not say his Prayers
Take him by the left leg and throw him downstairs (224).

By the end of that century, it is recorded again as follows:

Goosey, goosey gander
Wither shall I wander?
Upstairs and downstairs
And in my lady's chamber
The parson in the pulpit
Couldn't say his prayers
He gabbled and gabbled
Till he tumbled down stairs!
The stairs gave a crack,
And he broke his back,
And all the congregation gave a quack,
quack, quack (225).

And the following is the earliest recorded version of the rhyme, from 1784:

Goose-a, goose-a, gander,
Where shall I wander?
Up stairs, down stairs,
In my lady's chamber;
There you'll find a cup of sack
And a race of ginger (224).

These various iterations of this nursery rhyme make a number of things clear about its pervading central themes; in each rhyme, there is a central image of the “gander” wandering “up stairs and down stairs [and] in my lady's chamber,” with “gander” potentially referring to the aristocratic tradition of the “gander month,” or the last month of a woman's pregnancy, wherein “a man's wife lies in: wherefore, during that time, husbands plead a sort of indulgence in matters of gallantry” (“gander, n.”). Of course, “gander” could also refer to a male goose, the graylag goose being long associated with fertility in the British Isles, as recorded in *Birds Britannica* (Cocker and Mabey). This suggests additional sexual overtones to the rhyme in either interpretation.

Excluding the *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, this rhyme as more commonly been the subject of amateur historical speculation⁴, where some have suggested the rhyme was anti-Catholic propaganda used during or after the English Civil War. This, of course, is the period from which the ghost on the Ghost's Walk hails (Roberts 23), which would emphasize further the close link between the two Lady Dedlocks. The line of "old father long legs [who] will not say his Prayers," likely alludes to a Catholic priest hiding in a priest-hole during the English Civil War, who is taken "by the left leg," with "left-footer" being anti-Catholic slang during the nineteenth century⁵ (Oneill "6 Forgotten Nursery Rhymes", Cheape "Why are Catholics sometimes called 'left-footers'?"). "Cup of sack" also likely refers to a Spanish Wine⁶ ("sack, n.3."). With both Spain being a Catholic country and wine being central to the Eucharist and its associated, contested questions of transubstantiation, this contributes to the general theme of anti-Catholicism. Similarly, "the parson in the pulpit" being unable to "say his prayers," and gabbling "till he tumbled down the stairs," seems to allude to a clergyman saying his prayers in Latin as opposed to the Anglican-preferred English, misleading the congregation into a "false" method of worship ("all the congregation gave a quack"). Propaganda or no, these intonations of

⁴ The quest for the following information (as well as information on the "gander," etc.), for example, began with the Wikipedia page on the nursery rhyme, which had appropriately marshalled most available sources on the subject. See citation below ("Goosey Goosey Gander").

⁵ From Hugh Cheape, from the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh: "The saying turns on a traditional distinction between left- and right-handed spades in Irish agriculture. It has been used as a figure of speech and often, sadly, as a term of abuse to distinguish Protestants from Catholics: 'He digs with the wrong foot.' Most types of digging spade in Britain and Ireland have foot-rests at the top of their blades; two-sided spades have foot-rests on each side of the shaft and socket, while an older style of one-sided spade had only one. Two-sided spades may well have been introduced by the Protestant 'planters' in the sixteenth century. By the early nineteenth century specialised spade and shovel mills in the north of Ireland were producing vast numbers of two-sided spades which came to be universally used in Ulster and strongly identified with the province. One-sided spades with narrow blades and a foot-rest cut out of the side of the relatively larger wooden shaft continued in use in the south and west. The rural population of Gaelic Ireland retained the Catholic faith and tended also to retain the one-sided spade and 'dig with the wrong foot'. In fact, the two-sided spade of Ulster was generally used with the left foot whereas the one-sided spade tended to be used with the right foot. Instinctively, the 'wrong foot' of the Catholics has come to be thought of as the left foot."

⁶ "Sack" being defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "A general name for a class of white wines formerly imported from Spain and the Canaries."

the tensions of British anti-Catholicism are unmistakable, and their relevance to *Bleak House* manifold. For Lady Dedlock specifically, the sexual overtones of a nursery rhyme of religious condemnation seem an apt choice of characterization.

This same rhyme is used in another of Dickens's works, a collaborative Christmas story from 1858, called *A House to Let*, which was created by Dickens and written collaboratively with three other authors. The chapter in question was written by Wilkie Collins, entitled *Trotter's Report*. Trotter himself is the servant of an elderly woman who is lodging in the house across the street from the titular, decaying House to Let. He goes to the house on her orders to inquire about the signs of life that miraculously appear within. The rhyme is used within to reference a sickly young man, Benjamin, whose mother (who makes the remark) answers the door upon this visit. She is described variously as "a witch without a broomstick," having a

...dirty false front and a dirty black cap, and short fidgety arms, and long hooked fingernails – an unnaturally lusty old woman, who walked with a spring in her wicked old feet, and spoke with a smirk on her wicked old face – the sort of old woman...who ought to have lived in the dark ages, and been ducked in a horse-pond, instead of flourishing in the nineteenth century, and taking charge of a Christian house (71).

Her son, Benjamin, has "his inside dreadful bad again... and he will follow me about the house, up-stairs and downstairs and in my lady's chamber, as the song says, you know" (71-2). The allusion used, here, by this perverse and "wicked... witch without a broomstick" mother who, like Lady Dedlock, seems not to belong properly to "the nineteenth century," much less to be "taking charge of a Christian house." Here, this rhyme is yet another instance of warped time around Lady Dedlock herself, as well as Chesney Wold or Chancery more generally; the register in which it seems to operate adds dimension to the urgency of Lady Dedlock's secret.

Not only does this rhyme “warp time” in the very characterization of Lady Dedlock, tying her more closely to that aristocratic world, but it is likewise another connection she has with her daughter. Esther, who is known as “Dame Durden” at Bleak House, earns her name through her status as “angel of the household.” While Lady Dedlock’s relationship to the nursery rhyme hints at her sexual transgressions, Esther’s reflect her care-taking of a middle-class household. That Lady Dedlock is as much ornament as Lady to the massive Dedlock Estate at Chesney Wold warps her status as woman of the house into something of a perversion. Her childlessness, contrasted with Esther’s care of so many at Bleak House, reflects their differing statuses as women.

The first and only meeting of Lady Dedlock and Esther takes place near the grounds at Chesney Wold, and this is a site where time is, again, warped. More specifically, Lady Dedlock is more heavily aligned with the Lady Dedlock of the Ghost’s Walk in these interactions; while Esther is associated with the Ghost’s Walk, it is through this interaction that she learns to absolve herself of the guilt associated with the circumstances of her birth. She records Lady Dedlock’s initial approach as follows:

I had been looking at the Ghost’s Walk lying in a deep shade of masonry afar off, and picturing to myself the female shape that was said to haunt it, when I became aware of a figure approaching through the wood... at first I could not discern what figure it was. By little and little it revealed itself to be a woman’s – a lady’s – Lady Dedlocks (*Bleak House* 464).

Here, of course, the imagined image of the Lady Dedlock of the Ghost’s Walk morphs into the contemporaneous Lady; this transformation continues through Esther, near the middle of

that same chapter, as Esther is processing her one and only conversation with her mother. In walking upon the Ghost's Walk herself, Esther writes that

... there was a dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's Walk; that it was I, who was to bring calamity upon the stately house; and that my warning feet were haunting it even then (469).

Even as Esther merges with her mother in this inherited consequence of shame, she seems almost simultaneously to recover from it. In this same chapter, Esther writes that "if the sins of the fathers were sometimes visited upon the children, the phrase did not mean what I had in the morning feared it meant" (470). That is, that the sins of the fathers being visited upon the heads of the children carry unavoidable social implications, but not personally moral ones; as she writes, "I knew I was as innocent of my birth, as a queen of hers" (470). She arrives at this conclusion, importantly, through the receipt of a letter from her guardian John Jarndyce, "asking me to tell Dame Durden, if I should see that little woman anywhere, that they had moped most pitiably without her" (469-70).

Indeed, it is through her maternal role at Bleak House that Esther finds herself redeemed of the circumstances of her birth. It is through her time at Bleak House that she learns better than that which her aunt, Miss Barbary, taught her during her miserable childhood: "your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers" (*Bleak House* 75).

2.2 BLEAK HOUSE AND THE "EYE/I" OF THE EXTRADIEGETIC NARRATOR

"The universe," he observed, "makes rather an indifferent parent, I am afraid."
– Bleak House Chapter VI, "Quite at Home."

As John Jarndyce observes of Ada Clare as she begs his forgiveness for the transgressions of Richard Carstone:

I think it must be somewhere written that the virtues of the mothers shall, occasionally, be visited on the children, as well as the sins of the fathers (*Bleak House* 250).

While Ada and Richard are both orphans, they are both wards of Chancery and claimants in the case of Jarndyce v. Jarndyce. As such, it is unlikely, here, that John Jarndyce comments on the virtue of Ada's mother being visited upon her; rather, it seems that her virtuous behavior on behalf of Richard, and the birth of their son at the end of the novel, recommends her as the subject of the quotation here. That is, that Ada, as intended wife and future mother, shall "visit" these virtues upon her children as, indeed, seems evident by his birth at the end of the novel; "born before the turf was planted on its father's grave," and given his father's name, it was his "errand" to "bless and restore his mother, not his father... [and], its power was mighty to do it" (750). Esther says of the baby that the "strength of the weak little hand and how its touch could heal my darling's heart and raised hope within her," renewed her "sense of the goodness and the tenderness of God" (750).

Ada returns to Bleak House with her son, Richard, to live under the guardianship of John Jarndyce. While Bleak House continues to be a place divorced from Chancery, the legacy of its entanglement with the court lives on in the absence of Richard's father. It is for this reason that the recreation of Bleak House independently of these echoes, and without the historicity of these entanglements present in its walls, is the realization of the apocalyptic vision implied by Chancery. Indeed, it seems that on the receipt of judgment the world was made over afresh in the making of the second Bleak House, to be inhabited by Esther, the ideal Christian woman who lives in defiance of inheritance, and her family.

Of course, the original Bleak House is still anything but bleak under John Jarndyce. Indeed, for most of the narrative, it is this Bleak House that stands in opposition to the expansive and archaic Chesney Wold as a domestic space. As opposed to the stately emptiness of Chesney Wold, Bleak House is

one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, and where there is a bountiful provision of little halls and passages, and where you find still older cottage-rooms in unexpected places, with lattice windows and green growth pressing through them (*Bleak House* 114).

It is a place that, against the sprawling and cancerous massiveness of Chancery and Chesney Wold is a space of indeterminate size, one of a recovered welcoming appearance. Under the guiding hand of John Jarndyce, Bleak House is transformed from the home of Tom Jarndyce, who committed suicide in the shadow of Chancery, into such a “delightfully irregular” home as is suited perfectly to the needs of each Ada, Richard and Esther when they arrive there. The house, according to Mr. Jarndyce, “makes no pretensions,⁷” but nonetheless houses a variety of differently styled rooms and curious artifacts.

We are introduced to such places as Bleak House by Esther; such places as Chesney Wold and Chancery are more commonly left to the wandering eye of the extradiegetic narrator, what Elena Gomel calls the “eye/I” of the city itself. This extradiegetic narrator, she writes, is an “incorporeal eye,” which, rather than being “devoid of social conscience,” begets “much of the radical social rhetoric in the novel” (302). As she continues:

⁷ Interestingly, it seems that such “making pretensions” as Richard does is his downfall, in a foreshadowing of the plot of *Great Expectations*.

... 'he' (or rather 'it,' to emphasize the disconnection between the narrator and the world which he narrates) is a pure focal point of objective vision, uncontaminated by the bustle of the city. He sees but neither touches nor is touched, at least physically. For though the narrator may be moved emotionally and often expresses his reaction to the horrors of London in highly charged prose, the corporeal involvement, so profoundly important for what Richard Sennett calls the 'bodily experience' of the city (15), is missing (302).

And it is this lack of "corporeal involvement" which is the chief differentiation between the "Eye/I" and Esther Summerson. While Esther Summerson embodies the dehumanizing experience of being caught on the wayward side of punitive institutions, the extradiegetic narrator moves unfettered around the world at large, scrutinizing those same institutions. Gomel comments on this as well, that the city of London itself in *Bleak House* "is not one but two, as double as the joint personality of Jekyll-and-Hyde" (299). And this "joint personality" is the consequence of dual narration. For even as *Bleak House* is a work which maps "systems that generate, sustain, and often destroy what a Foucauldian would call a delusion of individuality" (299) onto the city, that "machine of power made of flesh and stone" (Gomel 300), the city itself both mediates and shapes "the individual and the super-individual contents of life" (Simmel qtd. in Gomel 300).

What is perhaps most important about the extradiegetic narrator is their use of the present tense. As Patricia Ingham writes, an understanding of this is "vital." She writes that

... the usage of the present tense by the omne-narrator in Dickens's novel is the timeless one seen in such statements as 'two and two make four' or 'all men are mortal.' ... the force of the present tense as used in *Bleak House* implies that what is said is undeniably true. Consequently, this narrator is given a privileged position, for this is *an epic vision of*

society as a whole. From the early chapters his authoritative language, combined with the fact that he is anonymous and invisible, enables him to record the talk and actions of the whole range of characters [emphasis added] (28).

Indeed, the extradiegetic narrator's omnipresence and seeming omniscience is what carries us around on the fog of Chancery; it is a voice sustained on social injustice, presenting itself as a more matured version of Dickens's "readings" of the textual city of London from his earlier *Sketches by Boz*. As Elena Gomel writes, it is in *Bleak House* where "Dickens juxtaposes the anonymous pleasures of the street with the urban blight of injustice and inequality" (298), producing an account of life in the city from the perspective not of the *flâneur*, but rather, one of the "most distinguished among a throng of missionaries and explorers," including Frederick Engels and Henry Mayhew, "who tried to read the 'illegible' city, transforming... a chaotic, haphazard environment into a social text that was 'integrated, knowable, and ordered'" (Walkowitz qtd. in Gomel 299).

In *Bleak House*, as in other of Dickens's novels, does the city come alive to the plot, its landscape playing an active part in shaping narration. It is the city itself, as a living being, which trains the "eye/I" of panoramic, cosmic history upon such subjects as the Court of Chancery and Chesney Wold. And it is from this "eye/I" which the story of Esther retreats through retroactive narration Esther's narration runs contrary to the extradiegetic narration, constituting what is in the forceful "present tense" of its story to be of her own static past. *Bleak House* is, of course, the locus of this rejection, and the place of retreat; this rejection becomes solidified and made permanent through the recreation of the second *Bleak House* at the end of the novel.

While the subject of the extradiegetic narration is the "modern city" in a revised Gothic mode, according to Allan Pritchard, Dickens's "horror of the city was far from total alienation

but was combined with fascination [which] is in itself quite in keeping with Gothic tradition,” whose authors “often viewed their subjects with a peculiar mixture of attraction and repulsion” (43). And, indeed, this mode of Gothicism not only illuminates the fascination with the urban “diseased body of London,” but sheds light on Dickens’s choice of title for, as Pritchard continues, the novel “could scarcely have [been] marked... more unmistakably as one in the Gothic mode” through the choice of *Bleak House*, “since Gothic novels much more commonly... were titled with the name of a house, castle, or abbey” (433). John Jarndyce’s reclaimed Bleak House is the most potent example in the narrative of private reform in action, offering a view of redemptive power where ruin once reigned. As Pritchard puts it:

Dickens uses Bleak House to show us how a structure that once belonged to that world can be reclaimed and transformed. The renovated Bleak House demonstrates the work of reform that can be accomplished on a private level. It raises the question that is at the center of Bleak House, how far the kind of rehabilitation brought about in the private sphere can be extended outward into the greater world (437).

Likewise does this emphasize the importance of both Bleak Houses to the realization of the moral imperatives of the novel. But, as noted ad nauseum here, there is more than mere private reform which is demonstrated through the second Bleak House – though, indeed, the existence of the first Bleak House demonstrates “how a structure that once belonged to that world can be reclaimed and transformed.”

It is also during this last chapter, where we see Esther and Allan Woodcourt living happily in the second Bleak House, that Esther’s retroactive narration merge with her contemporary moment. At this concluding moment, the cosmic force of the present tense which has thus far characterized the extradiegetic narration is coopted by Esther’s domestic bliss. More

specifically, the novel concludes on a scene that focuses on Esther's contemplation of her "old looks – such as they were," and her husband's assurances that she is "prettier than you ever were" (*Bleak House* 752-3). However, the novel finishes quite literally in the middle of a sentence:

But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen; and that they can very well do without much beauty in me – even supposing –

One might assume that this sentence concludes several ways. However, given that Esther's beauty is so fraught with regards to inheritance, having taken so completely after her mother as to almost give away her secret, it seems likely that a contemplation of her "old looks – such as they were" hints at more than mere vanity, for which Esther has never been known. As she says earlier:

I have been thinking, that I thought it was impossible that you *could* have loved me any better, even if I had retained them (753).

What these lines taken together imply is that Esther considers her marriage to be one that exists not only independently of her beauty, but independent of her inheritances from her mother. Not only has she washed her hands of the guilt of her birth, but her transformative illness has physically removed her from all resemblance of her mother. In this way, as Esther's narrative takes on the force of the present tense does she solidify her abstention from the systems of inheritance that wrought disaster on her early life.

3.0 DEATH, IDENTITY AND REDEMPTION IN *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

“More often than we suppose the great sayings and doings upon the earth, ‘thoughts that breathe and words that burn,’ are lost in a sort of chaos to the apprehension of those that come after.”

– Benjamin Jowett, *Essays and Reviews*, 1860

3.1 IRONIC DEATH(S) AND THE “FIRST BROAD IMPRESSION OF THINGS”

“Oh rose of May, oh flower too soon faded! Her love, her madness, her death, are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos.”

– William Hazlitt, “Hamlet” (1817)

Great Expectations is a profoundly ironic tale of identity and redemption that, like *Bleak House*, is interlaced with themes of inheritance and lineages “of choice”⁸. Populated with images of death and baptismal imagery, complicating and informing the many complex inheritances throughout the novel, *Great Expectations* is a human “tragicomedy” which explores the same anxieties over judgment as its earlier predecessor, gesturing at an inverted cosmic resolution. *Great Expectations*, contrary to *Bleak House*, relies only on a single narrator who tells his own story, as opposed to a smaller part of a larger one. However, like *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations* is the story of an orphan who retrospectively tells their story.

⁸ Holly Furneaux uses the language “families of choice” to describe “Dickens’s fictional households [which] famously provide ample space for the accommodation of so-called alternative families—groupings bonded through neither blood nor marriage” (153). This is from her essay “Charles Dickens’s Families of Choice: Elective Affinities, Sibling Substitution, and Homoerotic Desire.”

We first become acquainted with the narrator of *Great Expectations* in the midst of a churchyard, where he introduces himself by name. This is a crucial moment, as Max Byrd writes, as “names in his story are there to be interpreted, like literary emblems or metaphors” (260). He introduces himself as follows:

My father’s family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip (9).

Though introduced first through his father’s family name, and then through his Christian name, what Pip’s name seems “truly” to be is an elision of the two identities. This, though echoing them in sound nonetheless embodies a disavowal of both, an act that begins this *bildungsroman* with a repudiation of the patrilineal descent that locates Pip within the context of familial inheritance. This first act of naming, not only being an act of self-naming, is a negation of Pip’s “father’s family name” as well as his “Christian name, Philip.” And, indeed, this is where Pip locates the beginning of his own story, the story of his “education” and emergent identity. Yet while it is his “infant tongue” which formulates this name that he “came to be called,” this childlike omission will later be codified in the form of Pip’s legal name, as a condition of accepting his “great expectations.” As Pip must “always bear the name of Pip” (109), this is a co-optation of the naming of a parent by one who appoints himself “second father” to Pip, in effect exchanging one inheritance (biological) for another (financial).

This first scene of the novel is, like *Bleak House*, telling of its consequent content: the scene upon which we open more visually is what Pip retroactively narrates as his “first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things,” including himself, which was “gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening,” (*Great Expectations* 10) in that “bleak place

overgrown with nettles,” the churchyard. He stands before the tombstones of his family, having given his “father’s family name on the authority of his tombstone and my sister, —Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith” (9). While he has living family in his sister, Pip nonetheless locates the first formulations and articulations of his identity within the shadow of the tombstones of his parents, where he entertains “fancies regarding what they were like,” which he “unreasonably derived from their tombstones” (9). It is in this moment, as Alan Lelchuk writes, that Pip

...seeks respite by the graves of his parents, family reunion through physical proximity, as if this proximity with the dead is more authentic than his position with the living (with his sister, Mrs. Gargery). Obviously in terms of Pip’s deepest needs, it is (408).

As Lelchuk echoes here, Pip’s story is one of displacement illustrated on this “memorable raw afternoon towards evening,” where “that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip” (*Great Expectations* 10). It is no coincidence that it is this scene where Abel Magwitch makes his appearance, the man who will declare himself “second father” to Pip and become his financial benefactor. Magwitch, then a starving and desperate, newly-escaped convict, arrives as “a combination of cosmic accident and psychological fulfillment (of Pip’s inward summons)” (Lelchuk 411). Of course, as shown through his consequent ‘adoption’ of Pip, this is a moment of “psychological fulfillment” for Magwitch as well who, like Pip, seems at this point to have a curious proximity of the dead. As Pip recalls it:

...he looked in my young eyes as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in...on the edge of the river I could faintly make out the only two black things in all the prospect...the beacon by which the sailors steered...[and] a gibbet, with some chains

hanging to it which had once held a pirate. The man was limping on towards this latter, as if he were the pirate come to life, and come down, and going back to hook himself up again. (*Great Expectations* 12).

This is a passage laden with Christian Imagery. As John Cunningham writes in his essay “Christian Allusion, Comedic Structure, and the Metaphor of Baptism in ‘Great Expectations,’” the “gibbet” and “beacon” “are ‘ugly’ and ‘black things’ because they are corruptions of Christian symbols,” with the gibbet “suggesting the cross, and the beacon suggesting ‘light [shining] in the darkness’” (41). Of course, the beacon likewise echoes “the story of the unbaptized Nicodemus, who came by night to Christ the light inquiring of salvation⁹” from the book of John and “the Prayer Book rite of adult baptism” (41). Of course, Magwitch’s “limping on... as if he were... going to hook himself up again” as well as his “eluding the hands of the dead people” as he eludes living, suggest the duality of his condemnation, in life and in death, for his crimes, while hinting at the coming capital punishment which awaits him at the end of the novel.

Magwitch, like Pip, is a victim of circumstance as a child. Having “first become aware of myself down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living” (*Great Expectations* 259), he gives his name not of his own authority but, like Pip, takes his name to be true (“Magwitch, christ’end Abel”) “only as the birds’ names come out true” (259). For Magwitch, there is no discussion of a birth family at all – not even the tombstones which are the subject of Pip’s childish musings. Of course, by this time in his story, Magwitch, though seemingly having no recollections of a birth family (having, instead, only the memory of someone stealing his fire while he, himself was

⁹ From John 3: “the gospel reading appointed in the Prayer Book for Christmas” the day following the events of this scene (Cunningham 41).

stealing to define his earliest memories), later comes to have a wife and a child. However, by the time he meets Pip, to his knowledge, both of them have died. While we later find out that both have lived, this fact does not serve to detach Magwitch from his affinity with the dead in this moment, ambivalence he shares with Pip.

These are the first few of many “ironic” uses of death, as Jerome Meckier writes, which, in turn, illustrate one of the “many ironies in the title” of *Great Expectations*.” Death, according to Meckier, is “the common denominator for human tragicomedy,” which *Great Expectations* illustrates: “it is the last not-so-great experience to expect from life,” which “all of the characters... share” (42). This repeated, ironic use of death and “inevitable mortality, often unacknowledged, undercuts the novel’s grander schemes” (42), indeed, it is through this ironic employment of death that such characters as Pip and Magwitch become aligned. In fact, in Meckier’s reading of the passage of *Great Expectations*, the ironic role of death and its status in the “tragicomedy” chart a specific, yet seismic, shift:

...writing a year after *The Origin of Species*, the adult narrator recalls his brothers’ ‘foot and a half long’ graves (GE, 9) and imagines a grimly comic scenario in which, unfitted for survival, the brothers became victims of natural selection: ‘born on their backs’ and unable or unwilling to take their hands out of their trousers pockets, they succumbed quickly ‘in that universal struggle’ (GE, 9) (43).

Of course, this allusion to social Darwinist tenants anticipates the degree to which Pip’s own social future will be determined by them, particularly as they underpinned anxieties about class. It is his inferior class status, after all, which first makes him the subject of Estella’s contempt; likewise is his later ambiguous class status as London Gentlemen which is used to justify his being “beneath” other Finches, notably Bentley Drummle, whom Estella ultimately marries

despite Pip's confession of love. Of course, this obvious allusion to social Darwinism¹⁰ compounds the saturation of inheritance presented in this first scene of *Great Expectations*.

This allusion of to *The Origin of Species* when read against Pip's own name echoes the opening of *Bleak House*, whose opening passage is littered with conflicting allusions to science and religion. "Pip," as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is "any of the (esp. small and hard) seeds of various fleshy fruits, as the apple, orange, grape, etc." ("pip n.2")¹¹. This allusion to the "seed," particularly that of the apple¹², points obviously to Genesis 3. Specifically, this alludes to Genesis 3:15, the punishment of the serpent:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).

Pip, here, as "seed" of the apple is literally the offspring of the source of sin, be it as the seed of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, or as the offspring of Adam and Even in their fallen state, destined to exist in "enmity" with the serpent, and so to wrestle with the embodiment of temptation – here the serpent. Indeed, the narrative of *Great Expectations* can be understood as Pip's protracted struggle with temptation in the form of his "great expectations." That the novel likewise opens with a scene of intergenerational death, with death being the "wages of sin... [a] debt handed down from generation to generation" from Adam and Eve (Barresi and Martin 41).

In this vein does John Cunningham write of the opening scene as

¹⁰ Compounded by Pip's friend's name, "Herbert" which alludes to Herbert Spencer, the British Philosopher who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest"

¹¹ Interestingly, the word was formed in much the same way Pip's own name was – "formed within English, by clipping or shortening." Max Byrd also notes that this is the meaning of Pip's name in his article "Reading' in *Great Expectations*."

¹² The fruit is not named as an apple in the text of the Genesis but is taken to have been an apple.

...a parody of the Christian sacrament of baptism, by which (according to Prayer Book notions) people are born into a new life free of original sin; in Dickens's use of the figure, however, persons – namely Pip and Magwitch – are ‘born’ instead into guilt and death (35).

Here, notably, “people are born into a new life free of *original* sin,” as opposed to just sin – Pip’s name, evoking a specific entanglement with that very same sin sets him in an opposition even more diametric than Cunningham notes. And, indeed, it is this pattern of “baptisms” anticipated by this first scene of “fallen-ness” which recuperate both Pip and Magwitch – and other characters, besides. That the novel opens with such a “parody” or inversion of this sacrament simply serves to underscore its ultimate importance, as well as the overall ironic structure of the novel.

Of course, in this scene, Pip casts off his Christian name as well as his father’s family name in the realization of the name “Pip.” This self-identification as “seed” as he simultaneously disavows his father’s name carries far-reaching implications, identifying him broadly with humanity as opposed to a representative from a particular family, as the use of his father’s “family name” might have implied. In fact, that Pip refers to “Pirrip” as his “father’s family name,” and not likewise his own speaks to his disassociation with it. And, in line with this ambiguity of name, Pip seems to inhabit a position of shifting parentage throughout the novel, though he self-identifies as an orphan (as the graves of his parents in this scene obviously corroborate); that is, Pip lives with his sister and Joe during his childhood before being financially “adopted” by Magwitch from afar, and, following Magwitch’s death, takes Joe and Biddy as something like parental figures – or, at least, models of proper behavior and domestic bliss.

3.2 TWENTY MINUTES TO NINE

“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

– Malachi 4:5-6

The theme of death persists throughout the novel from this first scene, as Meckier describes – and Pip and Magwitch are far from the only characters touched by it. In truth, there is no better example of a character aligned with death than Miss Havisham, who purposefully lives in a world outside of time in anticipation of death. It is only this that would make “the ruin complete” (*Great Expectations* 73) which began with her heartbreak at twenty minutes to nine the morning of her birthday an indeterminable number of years ago, when she was left at the altar. In her “vanity of sorrow,” and in her desire for revenge, Havisham suspends time as far as she can, affecting the complete stasis of Satis House. In doing so, the moment of her heartbreak becomes all the subsequent moments of pain she endures; her desire is that her moment of heartbreak will also be the moment of her death, so that her dead body might one day be laid upon her own bride’s table. Then, “when the ruin is complete... [this] will be the finished curse upon him” (73). This moment of the past, then, is prolonged into the present for the purposes of visiting revenge upon Compeyson. It is for this purpose that Estella is raised and educated: to break the hearts of men who, like Compeyson, might have broken hers.

Even as Satis House hides from the realities of time – nothing having moved from that morning on – nonetheless time has passed, as is evident from Havisham herself. As Pip describes her:

She was dressed in rich materials...all of white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me (*Great Expectations* 49-50).

Here, Havisham's appearance is the grotesque parody of the young bride she once promised to be, a fitting image for a novel so ironic. And this is the state in which Havisham has lived for years, and has raised her adopted daughter, Estella – as she says, it was her haunted, gaunt “figure... always before her, a warning to back and point my lessons,” that made Estella so amenable to her “education”. The state in which Havisham lives is a state of passing the time even as she denies time. While she lives apart from the world, remaining shut up without the presence of daylight, she is surrounded by decay, which is characterized by the passage of time. While this is a rejection of time, surrounding Havisham are objects which embody it: as Pip reports, her dress is “withered,” and her hair “white,” while her dress hangs loosely about here. This is not the erasure of time, but an obfuscation of it. And embodied in Havisham's specter-like presence is a “vanity of sorrow” which drives her to such extremes as this.

While Havisham had originally “meant to save her from misery like my own,” (*Great Expectations* 298), it was through “the promise of her beauty” that Havisham realized the power

which she might have over men when she was grown into it. And it was through the threat of heartbreak embodied everywhere around her, and through Havisham herself, that “with my praises, and with my jewels, and with my teachings... I stole her heart away, and put ice in its place” (298). While Havisham had initially “wanted a little girl to rear and love, and save from my fate,” the only possible outcome of Estella’s upbringing was, as she herself tells Pip: “I have no heart” (183). Indeed, it is Estella’s rejection of Pip that makes Havisham penitent for the way she raised Estella, and it is him whom she begs for forgiveness. Upon his return to Satis House, after Estella’s doomed marriage to Bentley Drummle, she does just this:

Until you spoke to her the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done. What have I done! (298).

What she has done is, in fact, the replication of her own heartbreak through her initial attempts to undo it through revenge. As Pip observes, what she had done was “secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences,” and “that, her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker” (297). Her “reversal” of “the appointed order of their maker” was her “vanity of sorrow which had become a master mania” (297), leading her into her mistreatment (and, indeed, abuse) of Estella. “she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride found vengeance in” (297).

Yet it is Pip’s forgiveness, and not Estella’s, that Havisham seeks for this transgression. And it is only through a moment of baptism, and the destruction of the artifacts of her years of protracted misery, that she is able to receive forgiveness and redemption. Indeed, both Havisham and Magwitch, even as they seek the forgiveness and redemption of these children, each receive

divine redemption in the form of baptism, as Cunningham writes. More specifically, the baptisms of Havisham and Magwitch can be understood in the context of Matthew 3:11 (44):

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. But he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.

And, indeed, it is the steadily decaying bridal garb which catches fire as Havisham sits penitential by the fire, and it is Pip who smothers this baptismal flame with the “the great cloth from the table... dragging with it “the heap of rottenness... and all the ugly things that sheltered there” (*Great Expectations* 299-300). This is the final destruction of the remains of Havisham’s sin – that which lead her into her false education of Estella. In destroying the relics of Havisham’s past “vanity,” the path is paved for her redemption. Havisham, “covered to the throat with white cotton-wool... with a white sheet loosely overlying that,” lays on the table “where I had seen her strike her stick, and had heard her say she would lie one day” (300). Though, in Havisham’s initial prophesy, she admits the moment as the fulfillment of her curse upon Compeyson for breaking her heart. However, she now lays upon that table, dying but not yet dead, with “the phantom air of something that had been and was changed” (300). Again, as she lies on the table, she begs of Pip incoherently to “take the pencil and write under my name, ‘I forgive her’” (301).

And Pip shares in this moment of Baptismal fire. Indeed, Pip’s rescue of Havisham follows upon a revival of a vision of Havisham from his first visit to Satis House, in the abandoned brewery:

It was in this place, and at this moment, that a strange thing happened to my fancy... I turned my eyes... towards a great wooden beam in a low nook of the building near me on my right hand, and I saw a figure hanging there by the neck. A figure all in yellow white, with but one shoe to the feet; and it hung so, that I could see... the face was Miss Havisham's, with a movement going over the whole countenance as if she were trying to call me. In the terror of seeing the figure, and in the terror being certain that it had not been there a moment before, I at first ran from it, and then ran towards it. And my terror was greatest of all, when I found no figure there (*Great Expectations* 55).

And then, the revival:

A childish association revived with wonderful force in the moment of the slight action, and I fancied that I saw Miss Havisham hanging to the beam. So strong was the impression, that I stood under the beam shuddering from head to foot before I knew it was a fancy – though to be sure I was there in an instant (299).

This change of Pip's actions in response to seeing this image of Havisham illustrate his own redemptive arc, even as they predict the death and redemption of Havisham herself. Pip, from a child to a man, has gone from running first from the image of Havisham's hanging body, despite its call, to being under the beam itself "in an instant...shuddering from head to foot," despite "great terror" (299). It is in this manner which Pip saves Havisham's life: Seeing "a great flaming light spring up," and seeing "in the same moment... her running at me," he

...knew nothing until I knew that we were on the floor by the great table, and that patches of tinder yet alight were floating in the smoky air, which, a moment ago, had been her faded bridal dress (300).

It is following Havisham's death that Pip comes to know Estella's parentage fully: she is the lost child of Magwitch. And, further, it was Magwitch's love for Estella, the daughter he presumed dead, which was the reason for his "adoption" of Pip¹³. In another ironic twist, it is through the adoptive child of the other "parent" which Magwitch and Havisham seek redemption in turn, yet only through the other child (that is Magwitch through Estella and Havisham through Pip) that each truly finds redemption, or at the least, forgiveness. Magwitch, while declaring himself "second father" to Pip, seeks his own redemption through raising Pip to the status of gentlemen to spite those who look down upon him for his status¹⁴. Yet, for all his desire to make of Pip a gentleman, if this was the price of redemption, it was already paid through his biological daughter Estella, as Pip tells him on his own deathbed:

You had a child once, whom you loved and lost... she lived and found powerful friends. She is living now. She is a lady and very beautiful. And I love her! (*Great Expectations* 342).

Indeed, it is Estella's affection and acceptance that Pip courts so heavily during his time in the more affluent realms of London; and it is her acceptance that would solidify the social position to which Magwitch catapults him with his money. But without even this effort, Magwitch's own biological daughter "having narrowly escaped being a fatality... becomes a *femme fatale*" (Meckier 44) and "owns" more hearts of the gentlemen of London than ever Pip could. Indeed, Pip's own love for Estella seems to be an even fuller fulfillment of Magwitch's desires, bringing

¹³ "... he said... you brought into his mind the little girl so tragically lost, who would have been about your age" (303).

¹⁴ "And then, dear boy, it was a recompense to me, look'ee here, to know in secret that I was making a gentleman. The blood horses of them colonists might fling up the dust over me as I was walking; what do I say? I says to myself, 'I'm making a better gentleman nor ever *you'll* be!' When one of 'em says to another, 'He was a convict, a few year ago, and is a ignorant common fellow now, for all he's lucky,' what do I say? I says to myself, 'If I ain't a gentleman, nor yet ain't got no learning, I'm the owner of such. All on you owns stock and land; which on you owns a brought-up London gentleman? This way I kep myself going" (242).

his wishes for Pip and his love for his daughter into conjunction with the redemption of his status as convict.

Of course, Magwitch, like Havisham, has his own moment of baptism, though his is by water: “when Magwitch, Compeyson, and Pip plunge into the Thames” (Cunningham 35). Magwitch, having “gone down fiercely locked in... arms,” with Compeyson, said “that there had been a struggle under water, and that he had disengaged himself, struck out, and swum away” (*Great Expectations* 331). It is in this moment in which Magwitch “disengaged himself” from Compeyson which is the baptismal one; it is his decision to relinquish the old grudge against him, so painful and steadfast that he was willing to risk reimprisonment the night he met Pip to murder or imprison Compeyson. While he was willing to murder him before, when given the chance, now, he does not – and, as Pip says, he has “I never had any reason to doubt the exact truth of what he thus told me” (331). Magwitch, then, “like the newly baptized... [is] given new clothes at the Ship” (Cunningham 42).

Likewise is this is the moment wherein Pip’s “repugnance to him had all melted away,” leaving behind a “haunted wounded shackled creature who ... had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy” (*Great Expectations* 332). Indeed, as Magwitch comments while laying on his death bed in prison, what’s “best of all” is that Pip “never deserted me,” and, in fact, became “more comfortable alonger me, since I was under a dark cloud, than when the sun shone” (341). And, as Pip says upon Magwitch’s arrest: “I will never stir from your side...when I am suffered to be near you. Please God, I will be as true to you as you have been to me!” Thus, it is through Pip’s new, dutiful behavior to Magwitch that Pip himself is redeemed. Magwitch, gratified by this devotion, is redeemed likewise through the idea that Pip will inherit his money as well as

learning that his daughter has lived on to be loved by him, and to become a beautiful, genteel lady. In short, what this moment of “baptism” at this “cataclysmic shipwreck” is a submission equally a “giving up” of old grudges for both, and for Magwitch, a submission to death. As Cunningham writes, it is only now that he is able to accept and submit to his “sentence of Death from the Almighty” (340).

3.3 “CITY AS NIGHTMARE,” OR THE MAPPING OF PIP’S “GREAT EXPECTATIONS”

*“That to my birth I owe
Nobler desires, lest else that friendly foe,
Great expectations, wear a train of same.”*

– *Sir Philip Sidney, Astrophil and Stella* (1582)

As Edgar Rosenberg notes, “Dickens... gives virtually no identifiable place-names,” of Pip’s “childhood home,” while “his description of London every building street and back alley is accounted for” (9n5). And it is this hyper historicized London to which Pip moves upon his rejection of this humbler childhood lifestyle at Joe’s forge, just as it is becoming one of what Lelchuk describes as the “Edenlands,” or, domestic spaces which

offer possibilities of family togetherness and filial bliss, and as such serve the wearied hero as islands of respite in the midst of a sea of familial chaos and dislocation. (The scenes in which these- societies are on display function as a kind of transcendent still-point within the ongoing narrative; in the main they are irrelevant to the plot. Their effect is that of lyric interludes set amidst masses of prose.) These Edenlands are usually set apart geographically from the main environment of action (London) (417).

Of course, this description in Lelchuk's original quotation applies only to the Pockets and the Wemmicks's – yet, Joe's marriage to Biddy and their own domestic bliss, as well as the abundant contrasts which arise between London and Pip's childhood home upon his own departure, as well as the death of his sister, speak to the same effect. And it is because of this status of Joe's forge, and the home in which Joe raised Pip, that it is to this place which Pip returns upon the conclusion of his own great expectations, “worn and white” from his illness (*Great Expectations* 354).

The city of London, in contrast to such spaces of “domestic bliss,” is one of the great constants of representation between *Great Expectations* and the earlier *Bleak House*. London, the “diseased” city, has, in both, a “physiognomy ... ‘ugly, crooked, narrow and dirty,’” (Lelchuk 409-10) which makes visible its moral corruption. It is in the city that the depravity of such a “high class” community as represented by Havisham's teachings – and Estella's practice – “thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible” (Bakhtin 84). And it is in this setting where Pip pursues Estella most ardently for the promise of social acceptance that her affections promise. More specifically what Pip desires is the reversal of that first afternoon of shame which winning over Estella's affections might accomplish, for all that Pip is still the same “common laboring boy” underneath his “great expectations.” What Pip desires is the confirmation that this is no longer the case – that his own beliefs about these “great expectations” are correct, and he is meant for a life of wealth through marriage to Estella, as Havisham intends in this fantasy. But this is not how Pip's life as a gentleman in London takes shape. Indeed, as Lelchuk writes, Pip's time in London can be understood as a movement “up the social ladder,” while simultaneously “sink[ing] lower on the human” (12).

Indeed, the spatial relationship of these locations are what create their meaning; and likewise, is this spatial mapping of the narrative deeply responsive to the distortions of Pip's retrospective narration. It is the interplay of the conflicting worldviews of Narrated-Pip and Narrator-Pip are what create the narrative texture of the novel. A prime example of this is in Pip's first encounter with Magwitch upon his return to England, as Pip sits up reading during a storm:

If the wind and the rain had driven away the intervening years, had scattered all the intervening objects, had swept us into the churchyard where we first stood face to face on such different levels, I could not have known my convict more distinctly than I knew him now... no need to take a file from his pocket... n need to take the handkerchief from his neck and twist it round his head; no need to hug himself with both his arms, and take a shivering turn across the room, looking back at me for recognition (*Great Expectations* 238).

In this moment occur three layers of narration – the Pip who is retrospectively writing this account, the Pip experiencing it, as well as the Pip from that first scene in the churchyard. In this example of embedded narration, time is layered around Magwitch's reenactments, themselves spatial acts which gain meaning from their temporal associations. This is made most apparent by the “rain” which “drive[s] away the intervening years” between the first actions and their re-enactment, here; “the intervening years,” melt together under the shared burden of rain, the spatial realities blending the temporal ones. For just as London on this night was “stormy and wet, stormy and wet; and mud, mud, mud, deep in all the streets” (236), so, too, were the Kentish marshes “on the wings of the wind and rain,” Joe, with Pip on his back and Mr. Wopsle at their side, came upon “Compeyson and Magwitch, linked like Cain and Abel, in a death grip,

splashing water and mud in the ditch” (Cunningham 42). And likewise, on this same night, does the step of Magwitch on the stairway outside Pip’s abode call to Pip a “nervous folly [that] made me start, and awfully connect it with the footstep of my dead sister” (*Great Expectations* 237).

Indeed, the positioning of the narrative comes as much from this temporal layering of Pip’s narration as it does from its diversity of spaces, which match those of *Bleak House*. That is, as much as *Great Expectations* replicates a moral dubiousness about the city and juxtaposes it with the “edenlands” of more rural domestic bliss, the layers of narration that layer together actions in time create meanings that underpin the essential pieces of the narrative. For example, the night above evokes a series of specific aspects of the narrative that together constitute essential reversals in the plot. As this is Pip’s fictional autobiography, these moments occur during moments crucial to his own self-development. This is the case in the hanging figure of Havisham at Satis House in both instances of its appearance, and it is the case similarly with the image of Joe and Biddy’s son Pip which “brings the narrative full circle” (Cunningham 48).

Indeed, this last scene of the novel, even as it layers the end of the novel onto its beginning, marks a descent into “cosmic time”¹⁵ through a variety of domestic bliss which mirrors that of *Bleak House*. Though this is not through Pip’s domestic bliss, but Joe and Biddy’s. As Cunningham writes:

Pip finds that a proper father has married a proper mother to provide a proper family and a proper home; they have produced a new Pip... that name they would have given him during the rite of his baptism. His name is not that of a dead father. He has not been baptized into the exile into which Pip was “born” ...Pip replaces Magwitch as a kind of

¹⁵ This language of the “descent into cosmic time” comes from Rachel Falconers essay “Heterochronic Representations of the Fall: Bakhtin, Milton, DeLillo.” See full citation below.

adoptive father: on a visit to the churchyard, he repeats Magwitch's gesture by setting the young child upon a tombstone, but not in such a way as to invert his world (48).

More specifically, the text which begins "brings the narrative full circle" is as follows:

... upon an evening in December, an hour or two after dark, I laid my hand softly on the latch of the old kitchen door. I touched it so softly that I was not heard, and looked in unseen. There, smoking his pipe in the old place by the kitchen firelight, as hale and as strong as ever, though a little gray, sat Joe; and there, fenced into the corner with Joe's leg, and sitting on my own little stool looking at the fire, was—I again!

"We giv' him the name of Pip for your sake, dear old chap," said Joe, delighted... I took him down to the churchyard, and set him on a certain tombstone there, and he showed me from that elevation which stone was sacred to the memory of Philip Pirrip, late of this Parish, and Also Georgiana, Wife of the Above (*Great Expectations* 356).

This series of scenes are spliced together with one another, even as they are mapped jointly over Pip's "fancies" and memories and take us back to where his "first fancies...were unreasonably derived from their tombstones" (9). Again, we find ourselves near dusk (though this time, on the other side of it) in December, though this time, it is another Pip who is set upon the tombstone; as Cunningham writes, this is an inversion of Pip's inversion. And this time, that young Pip is introduced by a living second father to the memory of distant family, "properly" dead (as those of the distant past can only be), and this young Pip's "name is not that of a dead father." As Pip carries out his "proper" inheritance from Magwitch, in taking this place as second father, the young Pip promises the "righting" of all that was wrong with Pip's upbringing.

In terms of broader “cosmic resolution,” the second ending of the novel seems almost a deliberate inversion of *Bleak House*. While *Bleak House* ends with the recreation of a second Bleak House, Satis House, while in ruins, is only promised to be “built upon.” What *Great Expectations* embodies through a combination of these scenes – the promise of the rebuilding of Satis House, with all its associations of human misery, as well as the “cycle” of proper domestic bliss embodied by Bidley and Joe’s family – is a return to the status quo. That is, the “proper” family which lays “dead and buried” at the beginning of the novel is resurrected and alive in the Gargerys, who produce their own Pip, to whom narrator-Pip becomes adoptive father. The novel, which ends with the death of domesticity, concludes with a promise not only of individual redemption, but the promise of that redemption through the “proper” family. Pip, true to his name, likewise lives in the “proper” family setting, with Herbert and Clara while he works honestly “to get a living... in that universal struggle” (*Great Expectations* 9).

4.0 CONCLUSION, OR “OUT OF THE RUINED PLACE”

The novels *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations* intertwine in more aspects than that of inheritance, though this was the chief object of this discussion. And, indeed, such a discussion of inheritance in Dickens’s fiction may be (and has been) much more comprehensively carried out than has been done here. Rather than make any broad statement about the nature of inheritance in Dickens’s collective body of works, what this investigation has aimed at illuminating are the specific interactions of *Great Expectations* and *Bleak House* through a sustained evaluation of each. For the purposes of better understanding their specific interactions in addition to these parallel investigations, there are some outstanding points that deserve recapitulation.

In each novel does the opening scene do much to anticipate and illustrate the consequent novel’s themes and tensions. In *Bleak House*, the image of Chancery, a scene of “an antigenesis regressing in time... mov[ing] backward from flood to fall to creation” (Larson 135) conveys a sense of the perversion of biblical creation that the institution of Chancery itself represents, and spreads throughout the novel. In *Great Expectations*, the introduction of Pip with his introduction to Magwitch, as well as a similar mixing of secular and biblical allusions as *Bleak House*, conveys not only a confused sense of time (or of the elongation of the present, and the immediate availability of the past to this elongated present) but a perverted sense of the biblical.

The use of time in each novel is used to confer symbolic meaning that emphasizes crucial elements of characterization, which, in turn, inform movements of plot. Such locations or people

who find themselves the particular subjects of this warping of time are often those that are out of touch with the realities of the world of the more “common” people. This is best illustrated in *Bleak House* by Chesney Wold or Chancery, and in *Great Expectations* by Satis House.

With regards to inheritance itself, *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations* are novels that take as their principle subjects a variety of corrupted forms of inheritance. For *Bleak House*, the central institution of evil is one that either falsely confers judgment or forces an “inheritance of protracted misery” (*Bleak House* 105). In the case of the latter, as is the case of Jarndyce v. Jarndyce, questions and illusions of inheritance of grandeur are enough to force the moral decay and premature death of multiple generations. And, of course, there are related questions of biological inheritance and the inheritance of sin re: Esther Summerson, as well as smaller, though equally unfortunate inheritances (or lack thereof), as in the cases of Charley Neckett and Jo. Charley, inheriting the care of her younger siblings from her father upon their becoming orphaned as well as the “considerable disadvantage” (228) of her father’s unpopular invitation, becomes prematurely adult in their care. Jo, who is called only Jo, was never taught to read and reports that he “don’t know nothink” (239). His is a case that lacks the necessary inheritances that a child should expect of a parent or guardian – an education, a home and food. He is the destitute orphan who so completely lacks all connection he disappears completely from consideration, who “sits down to breakfast on the door-step of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts,” and “wonders what it’s all about,” the embodiment of “poverty and ignorance” (240, 240n1). This is a fate that falls upon Jo not through his own faults or failings, but through the chance circumstances of his birth.

In the case of *Great Expectations*, the phrase “great expectations” itself refers jointly to an inheritance of money as well as the expectation of social advantage which the money brings

with it. And even as the course is set to Pip's great expectations does he, self-named, unwittingly consider himself the heir of another: Miss Havisham. Of course, Pip is in love with Havisham's own adopted child, Estella, who bears the inheritance of Havisham's heartbreak, for which she was "adopted... bred ... and educated... to be loved," as Havisham loved he who broke her heart¹⁶ (184). And these inheritances, in both cases, are legally mediated, as they are in *Bleak House*, particularly those which are corrupted: Estella, in being brought to Havisham by Jaggers, as well as Pip's financial inheritance from Magwitch being facilitated through that same lawyer.

Even as an orphan retroactively narrates each novel (at least in part), does the "layering" of this retroactive narration likewise lend narrative texture and meaning to the overall narrative that is necessary for its coherence. For *Bleak House*, this becomes most important with the "descent into cosmic time" through the resolution of the second Bleak House which becomes characterized by her use of the "forceful" present. For both Pip and Estella, though, moments of retroactive narration are moments laminated with meaning, moments that already contain within them the echo of the conclusion that each character already knows before setting down their account.

While *Great Expectations* is a novel whose ultimate "cosmic resolution" merely gestures at the realization of apocalypse that characterizes the end of *Bleak House*, each ending nonetheless represents a "descent into cosmic time" which becomes chiefly characterized by domestic bliss. Though this is not necessarily the domestic bliss of Pip in *Great Expectations*, nonetheless does the realization of the "proper" family structure, characterized by "proper"

¹⁶ Though "if the often repeated word had been hate instead of love—despair—revenge—dire death—it could not have sounded from her lips more like a curse," as the love which Estella was designed to procure. The love for which she was designed is that which "is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter" (184).

loving relationships characterize the re-entry into the cycle of inheritance from which Pip's narrative departs with the introduction of his infancy at the foot of his parents' graves. The new child, Pip, inherits his name and the life that he should have led.

Bleak House similarly descends into cosmic time with the realization of Esther's domestic bliss, and the redemption of that last generation affected by *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* – Ada and her son, who does bear the name of a deceased father: Richard. Under the guardianship of John Jarndyce at Bleak House do they carry out a redeemed life, free of Chancery's weight of continuing to corrupt the modes of inheritance that are necessary for human life. Yet, their lives will always contain the scars of its corruption. It is only in the parallel reconstruction of the second Bleak House through which a true apocalyptic vision is realized, where Esther Summerson who, having cast off the chains of her own inheritance at her mother's behest, and through chance illness, lives wholly apart from its contamination.

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