

## **Foreign language testing**

**Character Development and  
Formative Growth Charles Dickens**

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## Abstract

A shift in the political, social, and economic environment during the second half of the nineteenth century upsets the status of the subject in the European novel. External threats from urban masses, the growing disbelief in heroism and individual emancipation as well as a crisis in narrative representation disrupt the subject's foundation, forcing him or her to go in search for new means of existence. In novels belonging to this period, Hegelian self-consciousness is countered by the eradication of singular experience as a self-defining act. This experience leaves the subject in a perpetual state of exposure without the ability to reflect back on him- or herself and weave his or her experience into the formation of a complex and whole self. Instead of searching for the means of personal constitution, the subject simply co-exists with the many other nameless characters of growing cities into which they are born. In this context the subject must determine new ways of grasping a certain sense of him- or herself, even temporarily, in order to avoid disappearing into surrounding oceans of crowds .

أدى التحول في البيئة السياسية والاجتماعية والاقتصادية خلال النصف الثاني من القرن التاسع عشر إلى زعزعة مكانة الفرد في الرواية الأوروبية. التهديدات الخارجية من الجماهير الأوروبية ، وعدم الإيمان المتزايد بالبطولة والتحرر الفردي ، فضلاً عن أزمة التمثيل السردية ، مما أجبر الفرد للبحث عن وسائل جديدة للوجود. في الروايات التي تنتمي إلى هذه الفترة ، يقابل وعي الهيغلي الذاتي باستئصال التجربة الفردية كعمل محدد للذات. تترك هذه التجربة الفرد في حالة دائمة من التعرض دون القدرة على الانعكاس على نفسه ونسج تجربته في تكوين نفس معقدة وكاملة. بدلاً من البحث عن وسائل التكوين الشخصي ، يتعايش الفرد ببساطة مع العديد من الشخصيات المجهولة الأخرى للمدن النامية التي ولدوا فيها. في هذا السياق ، يجب أن يحدد الفرد طرقاً جديدة لإدراك إحساس معين بذاته ، ولو بشكل مؤقت ، من أجل تجنب الاختفاء وسط محيطات الحشود.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens wrote massive social accounts of the changing urban scenes and the subjects inhabiting them. Writing *Bleak House* between 1852 and 1853, Charles Dickens offers his own sweeping portrait of a growing urban setting. This polyphonic novel of nine hundred and seventy-six pages orchestrates eighteen major characters and thirty-six minor characters, thus crowding out the chances of survival of any fully constituted and individualized subject .

The second half of the nineteenth century marks a turning point in the novelistic representation of the subject and its status. A move away from the *Bildungsroman* model, popular especially during the eighteenth

century, serves to disrupt the classical structure of the novel based on the development and maturation of the narrative's protagonist. The classic Bildungsroman narrative captures, in its beginning, a young subject alienated from any true sense of him- or herself and brings this subject, by way of experience and exposure to the world, to a state of full recognition of the self and its absolute maturity. The reconciliatory Bildungsroman is geared towards filling in the margin between the social ideals that the subject perceives in the beginning of the novel and his or her actual capabilities. Upon returning from a given experience in the world, the subject is able to complete the synthesis of his or her self with all that is external to that self. This movement of "return" back to the self from the outside world brings the subject to a level of compatibility with the external conditions of his or her existence, which contributes to the elaboration of a complete subject that no longer needs to evolve. In his article entitled The Paradox of Bildung, Adam Bresnick remarks on the assurance brought about by the Bildungsroman that "there can be no Terror" at the end of a narrative that has worked slowly to solve all conflict and to fill in the margin between the subject and the world. The classic Bildungsroman delivers at its end a fully constituted subject, complex, organically whole and multidimensional, who is ready to enter or has already entered into society in a functional manner .

Development of the subject by way of experience and education is what is most at stake in the shift in narrative style from the classic Bildungsroman model towards a more dispersed structure during the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, in the typology of the roman social, narrative may still come to rely on a single main character as a crutch for its own unfolding; however, the assurance of development, formation, education and finally completion of this subject are no longer part of its abilities. In a general sense, the roman social, narrative of the crisis of self-consciousness and subjectivity, paralyzes constructive change. Without hope of completion or totality, the subject is left to focus on collecting and maintaining the substance of his or her existence. Obstruction in this process happens at the level of the modern subject's "return" from his or her experiences with the world and the possibilities of self-formation and development upon this "return." Self-consciousness acquired through this "return" is akin to Hegel's dialectical system in the Phenomenology of Spirit. In Hegel's system, the Spirit (Geist) is projected onto a work of art, a Bildung, and returned to the subject bringing with it the alterations caused by the departure outside of the self. The two sides of the subject (Spirit and

self) experience, at a preliminary stage, absolute recognition of each other in a mirror-like manner. Hegel writes: "Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come out of itself. This has a two-fold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as another being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self." Through this process each side undoes the delineation of the self temporarily. However, in order to prevent self-annihilation, the opposed sides enter into a struggle to the death for preeminence and establish at the outcome one side as the master and the other as the slave. The slave is the weakest, due to his fear of death; the master, having no such fear, feeds on the slave's submissive behavior. Struggle between the slave and the master must result in the negation or sublation of the slave under the strict condition that both sides survive the struggle, accept the position they have acquired, and continue to recognize one another. Self-consciousness happens through the constant recognition and sublation of one antagonistic side of the mind by the other.

Although this process must constantly be reenacted, it generates a sense of certainty for the subject that is complete and whole. The transient synthesis between the slave and the master depends on the "return" of the slave from an external object back to the master, which is precisely what is countered and often made impossible for the subject in the modern novel. Hegel writes that it is "through this reflection into itself [that] the object has become life." This system of self-consciousness supposes a preexisting self with a delineation capable of antagonism towards the other or the outside world and ending with a final retreat back into the self in a movement towards self-certainty. As the notion of the self a priori can no longer be sustained in the roman social, the subject can only exist in an instance of exposure in which separation, struggle and domination of the non-self are inconceivable. Therefore, development of the subject through experience and education, as in the classic Bildungsroman, cannot easily be applied to a new typology that must constantly concern itself with the subject's means of existence. Exposure of the self without development comes to be the only certainty still offered in this narrative .

In this context, narratives with more complex social networks, where primacy is given to social interactions and communal behavior, slowly replace those informed by the development and education of one character. The feeling of failure and disillusionment affects narrative by rattling novelists' faith in progress and change in the modern world. Any notion of linear evolution in a novel is troubled by the crisis in representation and

production brought on by the failure of a Revolution that many major literary figures believed in and invested time to promote. More specifically, there was the feeling that the world did not hold a sufficient foundation to support the steady advancement and slow accumulation of experience and knowledge proper to the Bildungsroman subject. The 1848 Revolution in Europe was supported enthusiastically at first, but in the end it brought on more grief and misery than were witnessed at the start. After a seemingly successful uprising of the working class and petite bourgeoisie (shop owners and skilled workers), conservatives eventually regained power. Napoleon III's coup d'état marked the abortion of sequential efforts to provoke change. Michel Butor compares this time to other political insurrections :

To Zola, as to all nineteenth-century writers, Napoleon was obviously a genius. To their mind this explained and almost excused his seizure of power. In his spurious successor Napoleon III, on the other hand, the original distinctive trait, if indeed it remained recognizable, manifested itself entirely differently. The coup d'état of the second of December was an absolute usurpation which of necessity resulted in the dehumanization of millions of people .

Political repression and civil wars broke out all over Europe, as efforts to provide work and rights to the people brought only more corruption and injustice. The many fatal mistakes, disastrous decisions, and immensely flawed plans for the country coming from both liberals and conservatives, suffocated most sources of hope of reform. As Jacques Barzun observes: "Many artists died or fled from their homelands, promising careers were ruined, and perhaps worst of all, intellectuals were discredited on the one hand and disillusioned on the other." In the face of the political, economic, and social turmoil dominating European countries at this time, a general loss of faith in the guarantee of time and experience as the means for self-improvement can be detected as a general trait of behavior. In this irregular political context skepticism and irony replace ideas of progress and change. Efforts to create associations, institutions, or public services to improve the conditions of the lower classes proved unsuccessful and often even destructive of provisions already in place. In the face of this inertia and social paralysis novelists lost their ability to believe that a subject could accumulate, in a safe and warranted manner, the wisdom and experience necessary. The space in a novel reserved for the main character is perforated and porous at this time and can no longer contain the subject. Much like the political atmosphere just described, the subject, dispersed

into a ruinous collection of fragments, is unable to grow into a fully constituted and self-sufficient whole.

When speaking of the novel subject in general, Lukacs adopts a more nuanced approach signaling that the relationship between the subject and his or her surroundings is always ambiguously represented. He speaks of the interrelationship between inner and outer worlds inside a narrative as a condition for survival in the godless world of the modern novel. In *The Theory of the Novel*, he argues that the modern subject must, more than ever, open up the boundaries of its existence and let in the environment that cannot exist without this subject. And in this same act of expansion, the subject will come to rely on others as well as on external activities such as work or socialization. The defining relationship between the subject and the external object takes on a dialectical role in the mutual formation of both entities :

Even such a subject, for all its sublime humour remains an empirical one and its creation is only adoption of an attitude towards its objects which, when all is said and done, remain essentially similar to itself; and the circle it draws round the world-segment thus selected and set apart defines only the limits of the subject, not a cosmos complete in itself(53) .

According to Lukacs, the subject is not given a priori; rather it is created through and by its relationship with the objects that surround it and in the environment in which it exists. It is only by brushing up against these external elements that the outline of the subject can be drawn and thus begin to define the subject. Lukacs places this productive process in a two-way trajectory and argues that at the same time as the subject is created, all that is external to the subject is also being formed .

The modern subject is an entity that is no longer self-contained or capable of reaching a state of absolute self-certainty. The French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy addresses this problem in *La Communauté Désœuvrée*, a study of the internal composition of the subject that measures the reliance of the subject on the outside world and on his or her fellow subjects. *La Communauté Désœuvrée* is followed by *Etre Singulier Pluriel* in 1996, which revisits the notion of the subject, referred to as the “singular being” in an effort to denounce the falsity of the individual as a single unit and enforce the notion of a being as always already plural. This study will provide a deeper understanding of the radical difference Jean-Luc Nancy brings to traditional ways of considering the subject and of evaluating its constitution. I read Jean-Luc Nancy’s works alongside novels by Dickens

as a way of investigating the status of the nineteenth-century novel subject. With the Nancian notion of the individual in mind, supplemented and critiqued by philosophers such as Maurice Blanchot and George Bataille as well as Michel Foucault, I will attempt to challenge the way in which the subject has been considered by past and current literary critics of the nineteenth century .

In order to demonstrate the limits of modern subject's independence it is necessary to describe the internal reliance on the outside world that can be observed in both Dickens' Bleak House. Both novels are accounts of a highly dense portrait of socio-economic life during the second half of the nineteenth century. Dickens and Zola attempt to write the cities of London and Paris with and through a series of major and sub-characters that are both the means and the reasons for such extensive narratives. Esther Summerson is arguably considered to be the protagonist in Bleak House and assumes the role of narrator as well as subject of narrative on several occasions. In a passage narrated by Esther Summerson the heroine describes her childhood :

I had never heard my mama spoke of. I had never heard of my papa either, but I felt more interested about my mama. I had never worn a black frock, that I could recollect. I had never been shown my mama's grave. I had never been told where it was. Yet I had never been taught to pray for any relation but my godmother. I had more than once approached this subject of my thoughts with Mrs. Rachel, our only servant. Who took my light away when I was in bed (another very good woman, but austere to me), and she had only said, 'Esther, good night!' and gone away and left me .  
(29)

Esther Summerson mentions her mother and father's absence before even introducing herself. The peculiarity of this passage lies in the heroine's ability to recognize plurality in her origin by composing her identity with the enumeration of lost relatives. The novel retells the ways in which she first appears in a state of incompleteness and is inserted in a struggle for reunification with what is lost. In this passage Esther is defined by the absences she has grown up with and she reveals through this autobiographical description a relationship of codependence that participates on the level of her formation .

Dickens' heroine in Bleak House undergoes a similar instance of exposure brought on by an environment that pushes her into self-recognition. This experience is felt with the same tumultuous power as Gervaise's

observations of Paris and causes the protagonist to be brought further into existence :

The lodge was so dark within, now the sky was overcast, that we only clearly saw the man who came to the door when we took shelter there, and put two chairs for Ada and me. The lattice-windows were all thrown open, and we sat, just within the doorway, watching the storm. It was grand to see how the wind awoke, and bent the trees, and drove the rain before it like a cloud of smoke; and to hear the solemn thunder, and to see the lightening; and, while with awe of the tremendous powers by which our little lives are encompassed, to consider how beneficent they are, and how upon the smallest flower and leaf there was already a freshness poured from all this seeming rage, which seemed to make creation new again.

‘Is it not dangerous to sit in so exposed a place’?

‘O no, Esther dear!’ said Ada, quietly.

Ada said it to me; but, I had not spoken.

The beating at my heart came back again. I had never heard the voice, as I had never seen the face, but it affected me in the same strange way. Again, in a moment, there arose before my mind innumerable pictures of myself(296) .

Sitting in a doorway instead of a window frame, Esther Summerson comes into contact with an external environment that forces her to exit the limits of herself and to be created again through the extension of her being. The italicized personal pronoun “I” puts emphasis on the subject in this passage. Esther Summerson is altered by the arrival of her mother whose voice seems to dissolve into her own, as well as by the many pictures of herself that her mind passes over. The concluding lines of the first paragraph clearly indicate the purpose of this process: Esther is being created by standing on the threshold of her being and actively opening herself up to all that will come to participate in the formation of her being .

The limits of the self ripple and expand when exposed to the outside world, swelling out to include accidental parts of all that is around the subject. In fact it is not that the lines of the self are lost in the process of exposure, but rather that they are created, both in the world and the self through the process of confrontation. The fundamental difference, in a world abandoned by God, is that all subjects find themselves placed on a linear stage in a position of absolute equality. This new setting provides the means for self-recognition and determination of the self, not by

uncovering a source of immanence, but rather by drawing the limits of the other in the experience of annihilating of the other .

Esther Summerson witnesses the death of a baby during her visit to the brickmaker's house with Mrs. Pardiggle and Ada and tries to cover it up with her handkerchief: "Presently I took the light burden from her lap; did what I could to make the baby's rest prettier and gentler; laid it on a shelf, and covered it with my own handkerchief" (135). Esther tries to erase the ugly face of death in this scene and thinks she sees a halo around the baby's head when she lifts the handkerchief off the baby's face later in her narrative. Despite the heroine's efforts to cover up this scene, the instance of death launches the experience of the limits of Esther's subject. She is propelled after this loss into the role of caregiver and will continue to bend the boundaries of herself in order to distribute the care she fails to give at the brick makers' house. The expansion of herself into the death of others is self-formative for Esther in an anti-constructive manner that informs her about herself through alteration rather than through revelation .

The woman who lost her baby, Jenny, brings Esther's attention by way of Charley, to a dying boy that needs her help. Upon meeting the sick boy whose name is Jo, Esther lets down her guard and decides to take care of him. The process of expansion outside of herself begins when she leaves Bleak House: "'Well, Charley,' said I, 'it appears to me that you and I can do no better than go around to Jenny's, and see what's the matter'" (488). Esther recognizes what is to come and marks this moment as a life-changing event, especially in view of what follows. She writes :

I had no thought, that night--none, I am quite sure--of what was soon to happen to me. But I have always remembered since, that when we had stopped at the garden gate to look up at the sky, and when we went upon our way, I had for a moment an undefinable impression of myself as being something different from what I then was." (Italics mine, 489)

This experience already alters Esther and it is important that she is aware of this change. When Esther meets Jo he mistakes her for her mother and is frightened: "'She looks to me the t'other one. It ain't the bonnet, nor yet it ain't the gownd, but she looks to me the t'other one'" (490). This confusion is attributed to the boy's fever and yet his reaction as he gazes at Esther causes her to exit herself and to see herself through his eyes in a bewildered manner, similar to his own: "Charley looked at me a little frightened. I felt half frightened at myself when the boy glared on me so" (493). Jo mistakes Esther for her mother as did Ada while they watched the

storm from the doorway at her mother's house. And yet, the exchange of glances with Jo produces already in the boy's presence a change in Esther's perception of herself. Her self-awareness is disrupted: "I hope it was not a poor thing in me to wish to be a little more used to my altered self, before I met the eyes of the dear girl I longed so ardently to see; but it is the truth" (561). Esther feels uneasy at the thought of being seen by a familiar person without having a full sense of her new self, and yet further on in the narrative, she will realize that the change is what makes it possible for her to become aware of her own self. Although she was previously mistaken for her mother due to physical likeness, her disease and the experience of her limits through alteration finally generate a sense of self that is purely her own: "When I saw her [her mother] at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness; as that nobody could ever now look at her, and remotely think of any near tie between us" (579). Esther Summerson does not seek to become self-contained, she simply tests the limits of the components of her self by almost losing her own life and by experiencing the loss of others .

Esther repeats her exposure to others again and again until she finally succeeds in erasing her singularity and becoming an empty space: "She [Ada] ran in, and was running out again when she saw me. Ah, my angel girl! The old dear look, all love, all fondness, all affection. Nothing else in it--no, nothing, nothing!" (588). Her gradual evisceration through disease and isolation has in fact provided Esther with the means for self-awareness. Kevin McLaughlin makes a similar observation regarding the heroine's father, Nemo (in Latin, no one or nobody): "Nemo describes the disarticulation of the subject as an integrated center of intention. Nemo stands for no one--it is precisely the sort of legalese that obliterates individual will and subjectivity in Bleak House. The hand of Nemo is like an omen except that it does not point forwards but rather enact an uncertain condition." By elaborating a writing technique capable of sustaining the notion of emptiness without fearing a gradual "filling in" of the character by way of story telling, the author manages to create a truly modern subject. Esther Summerson's nothingness serves as a guarantee against particular dissolution. Because she is nothing she can constantly reenact herself without the constraint of any predefined limits. The empty jar that is Nemo and Esther to a certain degree enables them to rewrite themselves constantly .

Jean-Luc Nancy compares this recognition of the self with Hegelian self-consciousness: « Avant la reconnaissance hégélienne on a la connaissance: ‘la connaissance sans savoir et sans ‘conscience’, de ceci que je suis d’abord exposé à l’autre, et exposé à l’exposition de l’autre » (La Communauté Désœuvrée, 77). The distinction made in this passage is that the self does not exist a priori, in a way that can be recognized by the subject in a process of self-consciousness. Jean-Luc Nancy demystifies whatever kind of revelation we can expect behind this consciousness and knowledge of the self. Knowledge of the self does not shed light on any « immanence existentielle d’un sentiment-de-soi» (78), instead it is fleeting and will disappear before becoming anything beyond itself. Whether there is resemblance or dissemblance between Esther and the person looking at her, the moment of encounter becomes, in a similar way as has been demonstrated with the environment, a locus for existence. All possibilities of being are conceivable only in the eyes of the other: “Being is put into play as the ‘with’ that is absolutely indisputable. From now on, this is the minimal ontological premise. Being is put into play among us; it does not have any other meaning except the dis-position of this ‘between’” (Being Singular Plural). And further: « Mais c’est sans doute encore trop peu dire: la compréhension de l’être n’est rien d’autre que celle des autres, ce qui veut dire, dans tous les sens celle des autres par moi et celle de moi par les autres, la compréhension des uns des autres» (47). In this case, Esther is continuously acquiring a sense of herself, and this “understanding” can come about only in the presence of the other. In this way a being can never develop into a subject with any fixed ontological expression .

The fragility of a process that needs constant reaffirmation necessarily relies on visibility and observation in order to accomplish itself. Visual perception is crucial to the formation of Esther Summerson’s subject. She expresses great anxiety when she believes she is being observed by another being and reads into the eyes of her observer with much intent. She is very uneasy about Mr. Guppy’s gaze at the theater: “to know that that absurd figure was always gazing at me and always in that demonstrative state of despondency, put such a constraint upon me that I did not like to laugh at the play, or to cry at it, or to move, or to speak. I seemed able to do nothing naturally” (203). Esther Summerson is defined again by a person’s observation of her and this time the limits of the self-dictated are too restrictive and she becomes aware of the changes. In the same way Esther is able to read John Jarndyce’s reaction to her act of definition of his role towards her: “At the word Father, I saw his former trouble come into his

face. He subdues it as before, and it was gone in an instant; but it had been there, and it had come so swiftly upon my words that I felt as if they had given him a shock” (277). John Jarndyce and Esther Summerson serve as defining references for one another as they constantly attempt to give each other a title whether it is father and daughter, or lover, or husband and wife, etc. The important phenomenon in this relationship is that each member holds the power of self- and mutual-creation through visual perception, leaving both characters in a higher state of existence during their encounters .

This method of creation suggests that a singular being on his or her own would have no shape or meaning and no intrinsic qualities. The visual process of recognition as a way of attributing existence reveals the one-dimensionality of the self, derived solely from superficial characteristics situated on the surface of each character. Rather than to maintain the complexity of the subject or to struggle to regain it, the modern being seems inclined to let him or herself be perceived as a symbol or a signifier insofar as the visual representation of meaning holds no essence of its own and can only point to something outside of itself. Spectacle is an aspect of being that Jean-Luc Nancy insists on in describing the possibilities of existence of the singular being. This condition must carefully be sustained throughout the novel forcing the characters to never divert their gaze away from one another. With this in mind we can observe the ways in which settings and architecture in nineteenth-century novels are arranged in a way that enables constant performance and observation. The urban environment with its many balconies, courtyards, busy streets, shop-windows etc. caters to the modern being’s stipulation of visibility as a condition for existence .

Bleak House exposes the Jarndyce family, composed at the bequest of the will left to the two Jarndyce orphans Ada and Richard. John Jarndyce takes the two children into his care and calls on Esther Summerson to be their governess. These are all individuals who have come together out of personal incompleteness and who will live together under the roof of Mr. Jarndyce’s house. As we have seen, this assemblage provides many opportunities for its members to determine again and again their place in the community. At the same time as this community functions as the means for self-determination, it also obeys a certain amount of rules that are crucial to its survival. John Jarndyce comes from a long line of ancestors who have struggled against and sometimes lost against the Court of Chancery and he is well versed in the dangers it carries. Therefore, he places his composite family in a house outside of London and guards it

against perilous influences such as corruption, contagion, or even simply distraction. The geographical separation between Esther's house and London generates a certain awareness of the nature of the danger that threatens the family at all times. From the safe confinement of her community, Esther can expose herself to the outer dangers and retreat almost always when necessary .

Not being constantly plunged into the threatening streets of London, Esther can hear the stories of caution told to her by her guardian and by other victims of the Court of Chancery in a way that Richard cannot, as he is already so surrounded by the corruptive influence of the city. It is especially menacing and finally fatal for Richard when he moves to the city and breaks down the protective distance that once existed between him and its perils. When he returns to a nearby tavern to meet with Esther and then Ada, Esther can see the changes that have taken place in him: "Still, I had a tormenting idea that the influence upon him [Richard] extended even here: that he was postponing his best truth and earnestness, in this as in all things, until Jarndyce and Jarndyce should be off his mind. Ah me! What Richard would have been without that blight, I never shall know now!" (594). Esther is fully aware of the detrimental effect of such an influence and is astonished to see that perhaps the evil powers of the court have reached across the protective space between herself and London. Miss Flite and John Jarndyce as well as many others have warned the Jarndyce children to stay away from what they refer to as the "monster." The wave of evil that emanates from the Court of Chancery and that makes it way down and around the narrow streets of London does not always have a substantial appearance and the people who live in its proximity must be aware of its ethereal constitution: "'Rick, Rick!' cried my guardian, with a sudden terror in his manner, and in an altered voice, and putting up his hands as if he would have stopped his ears, 'for the love of God, don't found a hope or expectation on the family curse! Whatever you do on this side of the grave, never give one lingering glance towards the horrible phantom that has haunted us so many years. Better to borrow, better to beg, better to die!'" (389). The metaphorical phantoms, demons and monsters suggest that there is a quality about this influence beyond human and therefore difficult to ward off. The non-recognition of the enemy as such is brought on by a lack of self-awareness that ultimately dissolves the community. By directing attention to the threats contained in the Court of Chancery, Dickens in fact points to the level of care and maintenance necessary to preserve the Bleak House community. Once the distance

collapses between the individual and the enemy, this kind of recognition is forsaken .

Gervaise is not so fortunate because her own community is never detached or separated from the rest of Paris. As the narrative progresses it becomes notable that at times the small distance between people collapses, rendering any kind of distinction impossible. Gervaise defies the rules of impersonal behavior that are necessary for survival in a capitalist society through repeated acts of sympathy, generosity and charity. Georg Simmel offers some insight into the changes that must occur in the sensitivity of the capitalist and metropolitan individual if he or she is to survive: "Thus the metropolitan type of man--which, of course, exists in a thousand variants--develops an organ protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart" (419). The body's shape and its constitution have been altered through contact with the surrounding world, and a form of protection has been perfected in order to ensure survival. Simmel goes on to say: "Money, economy and the dominance of the intellect are intrinsically connected. They share a matter-of-fact attitude in dealing with men and things; and, in this attitude, a formal justice is often coupled with an inconsiderate hardness" (422). It is clear by these statements that unmeasured and uncalculated generosity are exactly opposed to all forms of rational behavior and will ultimately cause the downfall of the metropolitan merchant .

The lack of attention given to the preservation of the self is in part a result of the internal displacement of attention onto an external task. In this case the community ceases to be simply a place for existence and mutual determination of its members and becomes a function of something else. The result is catastrophic and leaves the community and its members in a state of ruin and disintegration. The Jellybys fall victim to this threat and come to represent a model of extreme departure from self-preservation as their attention is directed towards the seemingly abstract concept of "Africa." Unlike Bleak House, which retains a composite quality of a family formed in part through adoption, the Jellybys expose their internal rupture through signs of neglect, illness and hunger. This is a direct result of redirected attention: the older daughter, Caddy, is forced to write letters incessantly at the bequest of her mother in order to obtain donations for Africa, her father has turned his back on the numerous debts of the family and her mother is so engulfed in her paperwork that she has no awareness of her own family. This behavior can be compared to Gervaise and Esther's

penchant towards charity in that it induces a similar porousness that participates in the corruption of the family. Caddy is scolded by her mother for her lack of philanthropy: “I have often told you, Caddy, you have no such sympathy” (381), and Caddy specifies: “Not if it’s Africa, Ma, I have not.” This distinction between self-preservation and displacement of concern onto something else is what ruins the Jellyby family: “Since I first knew you, I have tidied and tidied over and over again; but it’s useless. Ma and Africa, together, upset the whole house directly. We never have a servant who won’t drink. Ma’s ruinous to everything” (480). Caddy’s father recognizes this problem and warns his daughter: “Never have a Mission, my dear child” (481). The notion of *désœuvrement* as a condition for the preservation of the community is demonstrated here in the sense that subjection of the community to an external task causes self-neglect. It is not that a community must be idle, but rather that an external distraction such as any given mission will cause the group to be directed away from its self-preservation. Blanchot insists on this condition: « A la différence d’une cellule sociale, elle [la communauté] s’interdit de faire œuvre, et n’a pour fin aucune valeur de production » (La Communauté Inavouable, 24). Mrs. Jellyby and Gervaise make the terrible mistake of orienting their communities towards a higher goal, interrupting all attention given to mutual determination, to the extent that their households fall apart and the members are spread out and dispersed .

Gervaise is lost in the sea of other faces and her death seems inevitable, even delayed, at the end of the narrative. She exits through impersonations of others, but she does gain from the plurality of her being: she loses herself and disappears as a result of her unguarded difference from those that compose her. She becomes them all and in the state of neglect and displacement she becomes nothing. Esther Summerson is similarly delivered into a state of plural identity at the end of *Bleak House*, and yet she is shown as a glimpse of the community she has formed :

“And don’t you know that you are prettier than you ever were?” I did not know that; I am not certain that I know it now. 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(989)”.-

Esther Summerson does not get dissolved into the elements of her surroundings; rather she succeeds in using interaction to form a

community. She relies on the identity of others in order to determine and express her own. She also can see how fatal it would be for her to attempt to arrest any kind of meaning or definition of her being and thus retains her ethereal existence. The sacrifices for this condition of existence is that Esther cannot use her community for a renewal of her situation and she must be satisfied at the end of her narrative with the mere reproduction of what already exists. She moves into a smaller Bleak House with her husband and starts a family of her own. This does not appear to be a reform in her life and yet perhaps it is the only way of progressing without undoing the *désœuvrement* .

The difference between these two narratives can be articulated in terms of their ability to repeat, to resist repetition and to use repetition as the means for self-development. Hegelian self-consciousness is factored into this study by way of the emphasis the dialectic of Spirit lays on external elements and people. However, as we have stated previously, this process claims as its finality the crystallized self of the subject and guaranteed self-certainty. In a context where this process can no longer assure its arrival at this stage, the act of self-definition must constantly be reenacted. The activity of sharing and of coming into contact with the collective substance are the only means left to the subject for the determination, necessarily transient, of him- or herself. If a subject can neither expect to encounter an end in the development of the self or neglect this process and do something else, he or she is limited to a strict repetition of self-affirming actions. This is where the discrepancy between our two heroines is most notable. Esther is a pure product of repetition. Based on McLaughlin's remarks concerning kinship between Nemo and Esther the act of repetition serves as the main component of this subject's genetic make-up. Nemo, the copyist, is paid to copy legal documents, remaining perfectly faithful to the originals. John Jarndyce copies Bleak House into a smaller version and gives it to Esther. The heroine herself repeats acts of self-determination by exposing herself time after time to the many characters that surround her. In the final scene, she repeats the same grammatical structure changing only the names in each sentence in order to describe herself through others: her "little pets" are "very pretty," her "darling" is "very beautiful," and her "husband" is "very handsome." The emptiness left in the heroine's place is sustained through the repetition of her descriptions of those who surround her. This final sentence in Bleak House's long narrative performs the required acts of observation and encounter in the repetitious way that this study has deemed necessary for the survival of the modern subject. McLaughlin

argues, "In other words, the final scenes of the novel suggest that in order for Bleak House to come into being, it must be moved or doubled-estranged through a process of mechanical reproduction. To take place, Bleak House must, it seems, be displaced" (Paperwork, 90). Displacement is associated with repetition in Bleak House in the sense that in order to displace Bleak House, John Jarndyce must reproduce it, and allow its name to be repeated. Thus, repetition in Bleak House participates in enabling Bleak House to take place.

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