

MASTERING THE UNMASTERED PAST TO MOVE THE PLOT FORWARD:
DICKENS, MEMORY, AND NARRATOLOGY

By Tory Ann Pingel

This thesis focuses on how the collected memories of Ebenezer Scrooge in “A Christmas Carol,” David Copperfield in *David Copperfield*, and Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* affect the narratives of their lives. What makes this thesis significant is that it shows how a character creates one “self” when he/she has not remembered or reconciled past memories. When these characters are not living well with their memories, they become “lost selves” and create a “first story,” or a narrative that is in danger of becoming stagnant or stalled. For example, Scrooge represses his childhood memories, and his discourse is short, rude, and disconnected from humankind. Scrooge’s “first story” is that of a man who has no ability to connect with the people around him. It is self-centered, contains no personal relationships, and is destined to be left in the hands of the third-person narrator.

This thesis argues that all of the characters take a personal journey wherein they reconcile their memories and live in the present with their memories in the past. Once the characters are able to successfully reconcile their memories, they are able to narrate their “second story.” For example, when Scrooge realizes that he can leave happy and sad memories in his past while having real relationships in the present, he gains the ability to narrate his “second story” of his “best self.” Scrooge’s ability to recognize his memories allows him to collect the language necessary to reconnect with society, and he gains the discourse to take control of the narrative from the third-person narrator.

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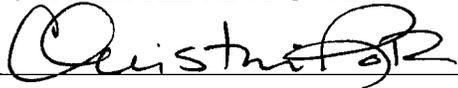
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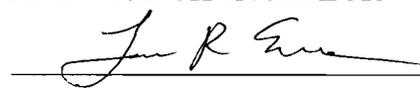
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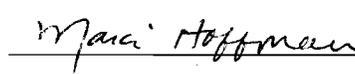
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To my daughters, Peyton Elizabeth and Juliet McKenzie, you are my heart and my world, and you make me want to be a better person. I love you both.

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Introduction

“...through living the past again, and communicating to others the lesson it helped to teach me, I had been a happier man.” (*Master Humphrey's Clock* vi.105-106)

When Charles Dickens created his characters, he did more than just write about them: he transformed *into* his characters, often moving from his desk to a mirror to mimic their facial expressions or mouth their words. Given that Dickens was so close to his characters, one might reasonably assume that he impressed on them his own belief in the powers of memories and, as stated in the quote above, the valuable lessons that “living the past again” can teach. Three of Dickens’s characters--Ebenezer Scrooge from “A Christmas Carol,” David Copperfield from *David Copperfield*, and Esther Summerson from *Bleak House*--struggle to reconcile their past and present lives. Scrooge attempts to erase his painful past. David romanticizes his comfortable childhood and tries to recreate his past memories. Esther Summerson, who has few memories of her past, allows one memory of cruel words from her godmother to form an idea of self-worth that she believes is based on duty. The characters in these three novels struggle to communicate the lessons they learn from their past, and while they struggle to communicate with the reader, the narratives in which they find themselves present complications. Scrooge’s narrative is in danger of becoming stagnant because without memories of his past that allow him to connect sympathetically with humankind, Scrooge lacks the language to narrate his own tale. David’s potential narrative is in danger of never being articulated

because he struggles with letting go the memories of his dead wife, and while he is mourning her and living in his past, he is unable to write. Esther's narrative is in danger of becoming lost to the "other" Chancery narrative of the novel because she lacks the self-confidence to believe that anything she says is worth telling. While the characters ignore, romanticize, and are struggling with their memories, they lack the idea of their "best self" and are trapped in a narrative that lacks a possible ending.

Audrey Jaffe explores her idea of the "best self" in the scholarly article "Spectacular Sympathy: Visuality and Ideology in Dickens's 'A Christmas Carol.'" While Jaffe's article focuses on how cultural representations and ideological values are represented through Dickens's Christmas tale, her theory about the "best self" also applies directly to this project. Jaffe explains, "As a model of socialization through spectatorship, the narrative posits the visual as a means towards recapturing one's lost or alienated self--and becoming one's 'best self'" (255). In adopting Jaffe's idea of the "best self," this thesis explores how Ebenezer Scrooge, David Copperfield, and Esther Summerson evolve into their "best self" on their journey of personal growth by learning lessons from their past and mastering their unmastered past. Scrooge describes the journey that each character in this thesis takes best when he said, "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach!" (110). While each character takes a different path to becoming their "best self," they all must reconcile how to live with the lessons that their past, present, and future teach them.

In order to transform into their “best self” each character must learn to live with the lessons their memories teach them. Scrooge must be forced back into his past and must come to realize that living with his memories of the past connects him to all of humankind in the present. Once he is able to connect to the present, Scrooge gains the knowledge to take control of his own narrative and with the assumption that he will take over his narrative, the narrative is able to move forward. David is unable to live his life in the present because he longs to live in his comfortable past. By recreating his past life in his present life, his narrative takes on a misguided tone because he seems to always be living in a story: he loved the carefree times of his childhood, so he rewrites the story of his adult life to resemble his comfortable past. But once his wife Dora dies, he must change his story and change his practice of living only in the past. David’s life becomes happier, and his narrative is able to be continued, once he is able to leave his past in the past and live his life in the present. Esther’s initial path to living her “best self” is one based solely on a sense of duty, but on this path she lacks confidence in both herself and her narrative. She sees herself as always being part of the whole and attaches her identity to her duties as governess of Bleak House. Esther must gain a sense of self-worth and individuality while putting aside the guilt she feels about her past so that her narrative will have a chance to continue and not be marginalized by the Chancery narrative.

Along with using the terms “lost self” and “best self” to describe the stages these characters experience, I will be using the terms “first story” and “second story.”¹ Both of

¹ In “‘But I Cried Very Much’; Esther Summerson as Narrator,” Michael S. Kearns speaks of Esther’s first story and second story. He explains, “Her first two paragraphs plus her final chapter belong to this second story and frame the first: they establish in narrative commentary represent important events in the second story, events indicating her continuing struggle to find her sense of self-value” (122-3). While I agree with

these “stories” are narratives of the self, but they function in different ways. The “first story” relates to Jaffe’s example of the “lost self.” It is a story that is incomplete-- regarding how the characters are living with the lessons that their memories teach and how this affects the character’s idea of their self. And not only is the self lost, but the narrative of the “first story” is also in danger of becoming lost or stagnant as well. Scrooge, for example, ignores his painful past, and as a result, has little story to reveal: his lack of compassion for other beings disconnects him from society, and the only relationship he maintains is with his money. His “first story” is self-centered, contains no personal relationships, and is destined to be left in the hands of the third-person narrator. David’s “lost self,” on the other hand, is so consumed with recreating the memories of his carefree childhood that his character becomes stalled in a sort of timeless phase where he is unable to look towards the future. David’s “first story” is his incessant need to recreate the past which hinders his ability to create lasting romantic relationships because he never envisions the future with his partner. David’s narrative is in danger of becoming only a narrative of stories where he is an actor in trying to recreate his past in his present life. Esther’s past memories focus on confusion regarding her parents, and guilt about her birth. Her godmother’s harsh words cloud her idea of her self-worth, and in her “first story” she believes she is worthy of love only if she is good and dutiful. Esther’s narrative is on the verge of becoming lost because she lacks the self-worth to see the value of her words and because she sees herself as nothing more than part of the “whole.”

Kerans’s evaluation that Esther’s “second story” is connected with her sense of value, the fact that I explore the importance of living well with memories and how this act of living as their “best self” allows the characters to narrate their “second stories,” my ideas differ from Kearns.

Scrooge is lost because he is denying his past; David is lost because he is trying to recreate his past; Esther is lost because she focuses only on living her adult life based on a confused sense of duty. The characters in each of the novels may not know exactly that they are lost in their “first” stories. Scrooge believes his life is full because he has money. David lives the life he always dreamed of when he marries a woman exactly like his mother. Esther gains much acceptance in her “first story” because she believes she has been dutiful and relationships are her reward.

In each novel the narrator, or in some cases narrators, are responsible for telling the stories of the characters. “A Christmas Carol” requires a third-person heterodiegetic narrator to relate Scrooge’s tale because Scrooge himself lacks the language--and control over his memories--to tell his own story. Both David and Esther are first-person homodiegetic narrators because they narrate their own stories and they are characters in the novel. And *Bleak House* has a second story line told by a third-person heterodiegetic narrator which is in the form of the Chancery narrative. These narratives will be discussed in detail later in this introduction.

Each character has a personal experience that forces them to recognize or reconcile their past memories. Scrooge’s travels with the ghosts allow him to revisit his past and see his future so that he can reclaim his life and change his destiny. The death of David’s wife forces him into solitude, where he finds that he must begin living his life in the present. And Esther’s realization that her mother’s sins are not her own creates a life in which she can choose to have self-value versus defining herself strictly on her sense of duty. These reconciliations lead to a change not only in the characters but in their

narratives as well. In taking charge of his own destiny, Scrooge is also able to gain control of his personal narrative and gains the language needed to tell his “second story” and the story of his “best self.” David’s narrative of his “first story” must take a new path after his wife’s death: a path that leaves his past in the past and creates new stories of his present life in his “second story.” Once Esther recognizes that the guilt she feels belongs to her parents, and she begins to see that she is worthy of love because she has self-worth, she begins to see herself as an individual and finds her own narrative.

When the characters begin to live with their memories alongside the lessons that their memories teach, their memories reveal a new side of their “self” and they are able to narrate their “second story.” Scrooge, for example, learns the lesson of compassion when he can sympathize with Tiny Tim’s poverty, and he changes his life for the better when he realizes that he does not have to carry his pain from the past into the present. He forms a lasting bond with Tiny Tim and becomes child-like himself. In his “second story,” Scrooge understands the benefits of sharing his life and wealth and of creating personal bonds. He gains a language of his own and has the ability to begin to narrate his story of friendship and happiness. After his wife Dora dies, David creates a meaningful relationship with Agnes, the woman who is more his counselor than his child-wife. David’s “best self” does not romanticize his past but listens to the stories his memories tell, while leaving the memories in the past. His “second story” is one lived in the present with the voices of his past acting merely as memories of where he came from. This second narrative is one that sounds less fictional and more and more like a personal memoir: David can begin to tell stories of his actual life with his new wife, not stories

based on recreating his past life. After discovering the identity of her parents and recognizing that the guilt she carries belongs to them, Esther can prepare to live her life as an individual. She marries a man she loves and not a man out of a sense of duty. She takes control of her own Bleak House and her charges become her own children. Esther's "second story" is her recognition that she is an individual who has self-worth.

The lessons learned from these memories and changes are also key to moving the narrative of the novel forward. The lessons provide the desire for the characters to change, and the desire for the readers to continue caring about the characters, which moves the narrative forward from the "middle" of the narrative. If the characters did not learn lessons from their memories in order to change their lives, the story of the narrative would be static, and so would the lives of the characters. Scrooge would always be lonely and always be only focused on money. David would always be living for his past and never look towards the future. Esther would continue on her path of living a life of duty rather than living her life for herself.

From the lessons the characters glean from their memories, they begin to grow and change. As a result, they gain the potential to narrate their "second story," which is the story of their living their best lives. In order to gain the potential to narrate their "second stories," the characters must first learn lessons from their memories before they can gain control of their narratives and narrate their journey to their "best self" in their "second story." Scrooge's memories allow him to acquire the language necessary to reconnect with society, and as a result, Scrooge has the discourse to take control of the narrative from the third-person narrator. David's "best self" is based on the story of how

his heart matures into a man who leaves his past in the past while living his life in the present. Esther's story is still ongoing, and while she may still doubt herself at times, she finds a sense of self-worth and is continually learning that she is in fact worthy of love and happiness because she is deserving.

In order for the characters to come full circle, they must acquire lessons from their memories to complete the stories of their "best self," and this acquisition of lessons is just as important to the plot of the novels as it is to the plot of the characters' lives. Peter Brooks argues that the plot must move *towards something* and that there must be a sense of accomplishment and ending (*Reading for the Plot* 113, emphasis added), and so it is true of the characters discussed in this paper. The "something" that the characters are moving towards is their "second story." The "cure" for their plot (Brooks 114) is the characters' gathering of lessons from their memories which allow them to narrate the stories and their "best self." Left unchanged, the lives of the characters would become stagnant. Just as the characters would not reach a resolution, so too would the narrative become static. The novels would remain stuck in the "middle" of the story, and there would be no "end" or resolution to the novels. Scrooge would still be a lonely, self-centered miser with a cold heart; David would still be living his life in the past; Esther would still be attempting to earn love out of a sense of duty.

Gerard Genette is a foundational figure in the study of narratology who wrote about three basic aspects of narrative: story, discourse, and narration (or the act of narrating itself). In his study *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Genette defines story as the "signified narrative content" (27), or in the words of Manfred Jahn, "a story

is a sequence of events which involve characters” (N1.1). Discourse is the actual structure of the story at hand and answers the question of how the story is narrated to the reader. The discourse shapes the story. The function of the narrative is not to provide order or state a condition but to “report” facts (the textual details of the fictional world) to the reader (Genette 161). The person or persons reporting these facts to reader explains Genette’s idea of narration: who is responsible for the words on the page. Genette was mostly concerned with narrative discourse because it was the only level (of story, discourse, and narration) directly available to textual analysis. Genette explains:

Story and narrating thus exist for me only by means of the intermediary of the narrative. But reciprocally the narrative (the narrated discourse) can only be such to the extent that it tells a story, without which it would not be narrative (like let us say, Spinoza’s Ethics), and to the extent that it is uttered by someone, without which (like, for example, a collection of archaeological documents) it would not in itself be a discourse. As narrative, it lives by its relationship to the story that it recounts; as discourse, it lives by its relationships to the narrating it utters. (29)

This narratological discourse is important because it manipulates the story and it also is dependent on who is doing the narrating.

There are different types of narrators as defined by Genette, and he struggles with the familiar usage of “first-person” and “third-person” narrators, in part because a third-person narrator might not be a “person” at all but could be considered more of a non-human observer. Genette also notes that what is important about the narrator is the novelist’s

choice to have the story told by one of its “characters” or a narrator outside of the story (244). Genette prefers the terms “homodiegetic” and “heterodiegetic” instead.² A homodiegetic narrative refers to a story that is told by a homodiegetic narrator who is present as a character in the story. David and Esther are both examples of homodiegetic narrators because they are acting characters in the story. A heterodiegetic narrative features a narrator who is not a character in the story. The narrator of “A Christmas Carol” is heterodiegetic because the narrator is not a character in the story; the narrator’s role is to provide a voice for Scrooge. The narrator of the Chancery story in *Bleak House* is also a heterodiegetic narrator as he relates the details of the story along with explanations of what certain characters are thinking and feeling.

It is also important to note *how* the narrators are telling their stories. As noted above, Scrooge’s story is told by an outside narrator. When Scrooge speaks initially, his sentences are short and choppy as exemplified by his trademark line of “Bah! Humbug!” But as Scrooge remembers his past and reconnects with humankind, his words become more numerous, light-hearted, and comical. David Copperfield, a journalist by training, writes his story for his eyes only, making him both the narrator and narratee in Gerard Prince’s sense, and writes it as a adult looking back on his younger days. He includes retrospect in the analysis of some of his most important life changing events, and Dickens arranges specific memories into chapters titled “Retrospect.” David is an interesting narrator because his discourse of gathering and writing his story is part of the discourse of the actual novel. Esther is also telling her story some time removed (seven years) to an

² Given that Genete preferred the terms homodiegetic and heterodiegetic, I chose to use these terms as well. Where first-person and third-person are used are with regards to references to direct quotes.

“unknown friend.” But unlike David, she does not have the confidence to provide a retrospective narrative. She is mainly providing observations for her reader, almost in a way where they can draw their own conclusions.

Also important to the discussion of these texts is the idea of embedded narratives. On a simple level, an embedded narrative is a “story within a story,” but regarding this thesis, embedded stories have to do with memories and how the narrators decide to present these memories. The embedded narrative in “A Christmas Carol” falls into the category of stories unfolding within other stories. The reader is presented with the story that spirits are taking Scrooge on a journey to discover his past. As this story unfolds, other stories become apparent to the reader: that Scrooge was abandoned at boarding school and that at one point he was engaged to be married. These stories or “scenes” are important because they lend insight into Scrooge’s past and provide the reader a chance to sympathize and connect with Scrooge. It is important that this connection between the reader and Scrooge is created so that the reader will believe in Scrooge’s conversion. It is also important that Scrooge comes to the realization that his “best life” is made up of many of these different “scenes” and that there are lessons to be told from the memories of these events.

The embedded nature of stories in *David Copperfield* are different from “A Christmas Carol” because of the person who is telling the stories. David’s stories are recollected stories and he is the one retelling the stories. This makes David an intradiegetic narrator--he is a part of the fictional world of the novel. Also, David has had time to remember the stories and add insight from an adult’s perspective. David retells

the story of his visiting Yarmouth for the first time, and as an adult he recollects that this is what home felt like to him. But in a very different story, David remembers what it was like to work at the blackening house of Murdstone and Grinby. Both stories influence David as an adult and recollected stories have a different kind of power to them. David has already lived through the stories, and he has had time to reflect upon them, which allows for additional insight into the story. As he remembers working at the blackening house, he remembers not only demanding nature of the job, but his feelings of loss and humiliation. He adds different levels of meaning to his past as he remembers and retells certain events in his life and many of David's embedded narratives reflect how important personal relationships were to him.

The narrator of "A Christmas Carol" could be classified as an intradiegetic as well but in a different sort of manner from David. The third-person heterodiegetic narrator is intradiegetic in the sense that he is part of Scrooge's fictional world, but he plays no role in the story. His only function is to tell the story of how the ghosts appeared to Scrooge and took Scrooge on a journey to gather his past memories and his future experiences. Given that the stories of the narrator occur in the same fictional world (Scrooge's world) as the story, he is at the same level of fictionality as the characters in the story.

Bleak House contains the embedded stories of Esther who functions as an intradiegetic and homodiegetic narrator. While Esther is narrating her story of being mistress of Bleak House, she is also telling the tales of those she comes into contact with: the Jellyby's dysfunctional household, poor Jenny and her dead baby, Richard and Ada's love affair and secret marriage, the orphan Jo's struggles and illness. The embedded

stories Esther relates provide her story a sense of friendship and domesticity that makes the reader feel intimate with the characters of Esther's story. Esther's story provides a personal account of the life she is building, complete with her own observations and life-lessons. But given that she does not add personal insight into her own emotions, the reader has a different sense of Esther as narrator as opposed to David as narrator. David is explaining his life through his recollections and observations; Esther is creating her life based on the stories of others. Esther adds very few personal insights or reflections on the lives of those around her because she does not feel worthy to offer such opinions. The embedded stories of *Bleak House* seem to take away from Esther herself as she focuses on telling the stories of those around her rather than focusing on her individual story.

An aspect of narration that differs from the narrators discussed is their voice. Voice refers to what the narrator is like--their personality, attitude towards other characters, and ideological position. The heterodiegetic narrator in "A Christmas Carol" has a voice that is kind and compassionate. He is a caring observer who reliably tells the story of a lost man. Scrooge's voice is at first disconnected, but as he regains his place in society his voice becomes excitable and more child-like. This shift transforms Scrooge into a likable character. David's voice is the most independent of the four narrators. He is orphaned as a young boy and seems determined to make a go of his life on his own. Therefore, it is intentional that his text is meant for his eyes only because he has only himself to depend on. His voice is that of a storyteller in its delivery and the reader can find David likable because his growing pains are familiar. Esther's narrative, while much more reserved because she lacks self-worth and therefore believes her narrative has little

value, is addressed to an “unknown friend” because she craves relationships more than anything. While Esther’s voice is compassionate and friendly, and provides a sense of intimacy for the reader, the narrator of the chancery story is descriptive but removed. Instead of telling stories with personal observations as Esther does, the chancery narrator relays factual descriptions which makes this side of the story feel more removed and less intimate.

Another function of the narrator in all of these texts is to convey how the characters progress from their “first story” to their “second story.” David distinctly states that his narrative is intended for “no eyes by mine” (511), implying a sense of privilege to the reader for being afforded the opportunity to read David’s words. Esther, on the other hand, thinks of an “unknown friend” when crafting her stories (767). She insists that the unknown friend and she will part at the end of her story, placing the reader in a more intimate relationship with Esther. Where the reader might feel a sense of looking over David’s shoulder and not being invited to be part of his story, Esther’s narrative, although she insists she has difficulty in beginning narrative because she is not clever, is more personal and intimate. This especially holds true when considering the almost austere quality of the Chancery narrative that is told next to Esther’s. The heterodiegetic narrator in “A Christmas Carol” acts as a jovial uncle or grandfather inviting the reader into the tale with a feeling of intimacy. This is done because Scrooge lacks the ability to tell his own story, and he is not connected with humankind and therefore would not be able to connect with the reader. The heterodiegetic narrator also closes out the story as a way to add credibility to Scrooge’s miraculous conversion.

As the narrators progress from their “first story” to their “second story,” the movement of the novel as a whole also progresses. For if Scrooge had not found the capability to feel sympathy, he would have remained in his humbug ways. If David’s heart had not awoke to live in the present, he would have continued to roam the Swiss countryside, never writing, only pining after his dead wife. If Esther had not released the guilt of her parents and begun to view herself as a worthy individual, she would have married out of duty and remained happy but never completely satisfied.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses Scrooge’s conversion from a man who attempts to shield himself from human connections by repressing his memories into a joyful man who learns compassion from his memories. Scrooge’s poverty-stricken childhood has a direct effect on the person he becomes as an adult. As a child, he is lonely and separated from his family, and he sees money as the “fix” to his sadness and loneliness. Scrooge’s journey with the three spirits provides a way for him to reconnect with his memories and learn valuable lessons from memories of family. During his visit to the future, Scrooge is able to foresee his own lonely death, prompting him to make drastic changes in his life. Scrooge completes his journey to his “best self” by relearning how to be a compassionate member of society and by obtaining the language to begin his “second story” without completely taking over control of the narration. Scrooge has the potential to narrate his own “second story,” but the tale ends before he actually articulates his story (it remains merely a potential “story” for the reader to imagine).

The second chapter focuses on David Copperfield’s romanticizing of his past and how that skewed view leads him to an unsettled adulthood. Through immature

relationships, David attempts to recreate his childhood and hold on to his happiness and memories of carefree times. David becomes consumed by his nostalgia, and the result is a distorted view of his wife and marriage. David's change begins as a twitch in his soul when he recognizes that something is amiss in both his scrambled married life and his unsettled self. In mastering his past, David is empowered to write "A Story"-- his "second story," the story of his life, a life where he leaves his past in the past.

The third chapter discusses Esther Summerson, who has very fragmented memories of her childhood, but who as an adult holds close the memory of her aunt telling her it would have been better if Esther had never been born. Esther creates a vow to always be good and to earn the love of others. These beliefs cause Esther confusion regarding her "best self" because she feels that love is only a reward for being good and dutiful. Esther's change is less of an instantaneous epiphany as it is more of a gathering of fragments and her discourse is at times fragmented because she has so little information about her past. Once Esther is able to shed the memories of the guilt and worthlessness her godmother instilled in her, she is finally able to recognize her self-worth and to begin living as an individual and creating a "second story."

David Copperfield's Aunt Betsey wisely advises David: "It's in vain, Trot, to recall the past, unless it works some influence upon the present" (297). It is true that the past must influence the present, but as Brooks notes, "the past needs to be incorporated as past within the present" (134). Living without a past proves even more painful for Scrooge than does remembering the suffering he endures as a child because he alienates himself from society. David's attempt to recreate his past leaves him feeling unsettled

and prevents him from seeing his future. And for Esther, living with the guilt and the confusion of her past proves to be confusing and she loses her sense of self. Before these characters have learned lessons from their past, they are living with their “unmastered past,” as Brooks labels this stage in their lives (125). Once they are able to live well with their memories and the lessons their memories teach them they are able to master their past. Scrooge gains the ability to reconnect with society, David begins to live his life in the present, and Esther gains a sense of self-worth. Once the characters gain control of their memories they also gain control of their narratives. Once all of this transformation and gathering has occurred the characters are able to tell the “second stories” of their “best selves.”

Chapter I

Ebenezer Scrooge: Living and Narrating in the Past, the Present, and the Future

When Charles Dickens died on June 9, 1870, Theodore Watts-Dunton overheard a little girl in London exclaim, “Dickens Dead? Then will Father Christmas die too?” (*A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings* xi). If Charles Dickens earned the moniker “Father Christmas,” then one of his most infamous and most recognized characters, Ebenezer Scrooge from “A Christmas Carol,” is Dickens’s antithesis. With a resounding “Bah! Humbug!” Scrooge denies the warmth and camaraderie of not only the holiday season, but of his entire life as well. Hurt by his impoverished and lonely childhood, he represses the painful memories of his past to protect himself from further hurt. In doing so, Scrooge completely alienates himself from society. Scrooge’s only companion in life is money, which is a commodity he can acquire and control. His focus on money alienates him from society and his lost memories alienate him from his “best self.” Scrooge’s “first story” is one that is self-centered, contains no personal relationships, and is destined to be controlled by a heterodiegetic narrator because Scrooge is completely focused on himself. His “best self” is lacking a story and discourse because he represses his memories and the lessons they contain. When Scrooge sees his lonely death, he realizes that he must change his life, and in changing his life, he is able to change his narrative and regain entry into society. Scrooge’s connection to the joyful side of Christmas and the Christmas spirit allows him to gain the potential language to

tell his “second story,” a story he is able to narrate himself, while he recaptures his “best self.”

Because Scrooge lacks connection to humankind, he also lacks the discourse to narrate his own story. Before his encounters with his past and future his worldview and his language are very narrow and limited. His worldview is limited to obtaining money. His language is limited to his use of the words “Bah! Humbug!” As such, Scrooge requires a third-person heterodiegetic narrator to lead the reader through his story of change. And although Scrooge does change his life and gathers the ability to narrative his own story, his discourse is still limited because he has just begun to regain admission into humankind. His emotions and his language are child-like and give the reader the impression that he is starting over. At the end of his story Scrooge still relies on the third-person narrator to close his narrative.

Scrooge’s personal mantra of “Bah! Humbug!” lends insight into the nature of his lost character and is the resounding theme for his “first story.” Humbug is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “a thing which is not really what it pretends to be; an imposture, a deception, fraud, sham.”³ Scrooge’s persona of being a cold-hearted man who is alienated from society is a sham created by Scrooge himself as a way to protect him from his painful past. Scrooge’s incessant need to control money and to hoard money provides him a sense of control that he lacked as a feeling child and young man. It also gives him the feeling of power and superiority over others, which further alienates him from those around him.

³ Obtained from the OED online version on March 24, 2012.

One of Scrooge's "scams" is his belief that money can erase his painful, poverty-stricken past. As a child, Scrooge is sent away to boarding school and forced to live away from his family. As a young adult, he struggles to make a life for himself as an apprentice under Fezziwig. As Scrooge's fortune grew and he gained control over his money, he grew from a lonely child into an alienated adult. Once Scrooge understands he can control money and not people, his sense of duty shifts from personal relationships to one that focuses on money and numbers. The narrator describes Scrooge as possessing "a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!" (34) Scrooge lurks on the fringe of society, and the "very thing he liked" was to "edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance" (34-5). Scrooge has no need for sympathy and no need for personal relationships because he has replaced people with money.

Scrooge's disconnect with the world around him is made further evident in his inability to recognize the spirit of the Christmas season. Scrooge's definition of Christmas is very different from Dickens's, for where Dickens focuses on people, Scrooge focuses on money. In the short story "What Christmas is as We Get Older," Dickens's defines the Christmas spirit as "the spirit of active usefulness, perseverance, cheerful discharge of duty, kindness, and forbearance!" (*A Christmas Carol* 249). Scrooge, on the other hand, defines Christmas in a way that is centered around his idol, and he tells his nephew, "What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months

presented dead against you?” (36) Scrooge can never be connected to the true spirit of Christmas as long as his duty lies in being focused only on money.

Scrooge’s obsession on money is more than just a reflection of his “outrageous miser and ogre” personality, as Harry Stone describes Scrooge’s personality in “Fairy-Tale Form in *A Christmas Carol*” (78). While Scrooge neglects all of his childhood memories, he can never erase the feelings he has about being poor, and this memory is what drives him to be faithful only to money instead of personal relationships. When Scrooge’s fiancé Belle accuses him of changing because of his obsession with money, Scrooge tells her that being poor is the most painful and disgraceful situation anyone can experience. He learns the wrong lesson from his poverty: Scrooge views himself as successful because he has finally secured financial wealth and can erase the poverty of his childhood. What Scrooge has earned monetarily causes him to lose all connection with the human community.

Scrooge, while scared and vulnerable as a child, becomes strong and impenetrable as an adult. Stone notes that in making himself invulnerable, Scrooge is shutting out all of humanity (80). Stone further states that as an attempt to triumph over his past, Scrooge has completely forgotten not just the pain and loneliness, but the laughter and imagination of being a child (80). His language is limited to only the two words “Bah! Humbug!” and as such, he is not even participating in his own story. By repressing his past, Scrooge has no beginning. By making money his burden and his only companion, he has no present because he has no personal connections and no stories of compassion. Because he lacks a present, he cannot see his future. His obligation to money provides for

a narrative, or a “first story,” with a discourse that is very self-focused and self-centered, and this narrow focus provides no room for the narrative to grow or change. The plot of Scrooge’s story is headed nowhere if Scrooge remains stuck in his “first story.” Scrooge will always be dependent on the third-person narrator to tell his “first story” of pain and suffering as long as he cannot reconcile with his past in order to form personal relationships. Scrooge cannot even see that his “first story” is headed to a place of extreme isolation and sadness until it is revealed to him by The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Scrooge must be reminded of his childhood in order to gain a connection to his beginning, and the three ghosts that come to him transport him back to his memories allow him to relearn lessons from happy and sad times.

Because Scrooge has completely alienated himself from the “human community,” something fantastical and supernatural must bring him back to his memories. In “The Christmas Books,” Michael Slater argues that the ghosts “work Scrooge’s conversion” (21), and it has to be the ghost of Marley, Scrooge’s deceased business partner, who gets Scrooge’s attention. Marley was Scrooge’s last real personal relationship, and he was “[Marley’s] sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend and his sole mourner” (33). Marley is not only Scrooge’s connection between his past and his present, but he is a conversion between Scrooge’s “first story” and “second story.” Just as Marley must make Scrooge believe that he needs to live with memories from his past, Marley’s appearance gives Scrooge the courage he needs to revisit his past and start to put his own words to his memories. In the critical essay “Dickens’ Artistry and *The Haunted Man*,” Harry Stone explains this method for

change that was common in Dickens's Christmas tales: "The method Dickens uses in his Christmas-book fairy tales for the time consists of taking a protagonist who displays false values and making him, through a series of extraordinary events, see his error" (495). Marley is Scrooge's first encounter with the extraordinary.

Once Marley confirms that Scrooge believes in him, and Scrooge confides that Marley was always a good friend to him, a bond is shared between the two characters. This trust must be established between the man and the ghost in order for Scrooge to continue on his journey with the other ghosts. Stone describes that there is the need for supernatural creatures to "control" what is going on with their human subjects to precipitate the character's resolution, because the bulk of the action of Scrooge's tale takes place in a "dream" or other dimension. Stone explains, "The fairy-tale machinery dominates the story, for the bulk of the action takes place in a dream or vision presided over by supernatural creatures who control what goes on" (495).⁴ Given that Marley was Scrooge's only connection to the human world, it must be Marley who is Scrooge's connection to the spiritual world as well, creating a believable story for the reader.⁵

⁴ Stone goes on to explain why this method was so important to Dickens's writing: "This structure was of immense value to Dickens. It gave him a framework that provided an esthetic justification...He could now show misery and horror and yet do it in a context of joyful affirmation. He could depict evil flourishing to do its ultimate flowering and still deny that flowering. He could introduce the most disparate scenes, events, and visions without losing the reader's confidence. He could manipulate time with no need to obey the ordinary laws of chronology" (495).

⁵ The idea of ghosts and haunting also applies to David Copperfield. David is not only haunted by the ghosts of his past memories (he specifically makes mention of this on page 134 - "I now approach a period of my life, which I can never lose the remembrance of, while I remember any thing: and the recollection of which has often, without my invocation, come before me like a ghost, and haunted happier times") but he is also in some ways haunted by his wife, who herself is a ghostly image while alive. David

Once Marley has gained Scrooge's confidence, he must teach him about the powers that memories hold. Scrooge has no idea what powers memory can have on him because at this point, he has completely erased all of his childhood memories, both happy and sad. Marley impresses upon Scrooge the importance of memories when he explains:

‘It is required of every man,’ the Ghost returned, ‘that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world--oh, woe is me!--and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!’

(47)

The spirit's warning is a clear indicator that Scrooge must begin to forge meaningful, personal relationships with other human beings so he can be content in death. Scrooge is in danger of carrying the burden of his sadness and loneliness with him in death if he does not come to grips with his past while he is alive. And in coming to grips with his past, Scrooge can begin to forge relationships in his present life. The life that Scrooge lives in the present, the “first story,” is the story of an isolated life that he has created as a sort of protection from his painful past.

himself describes Dora as “a thing of light, and airiness, and joy” (459) and as someone not even human, but as “the innocent figure I dearly loved” (543). These adjectives David chooses to describe Dora are more than figurative language used by a fiction writer: the words paint the picture of a woman who is objectified, floating around in white gowns, her feet hardly touching the floor, living in another world. The failure of their marriage could certainly have to do with David's undisciplined heart, but it could also have to do with the fact that David does not regard Dora as a real person.

Scrooge's first step in recognizing his "best self" is remembering his past, and learning from his memories what really matters to him in life. In remembering his past, especially his childhood, Scrooge will gain a beginning to his "second story." When the ghost takes Scrooge back to his childhood hometown, Scrooge begins to author his own story at the very beginning in very simple terms, "'Good Heaven!' said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. 'I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!'" (56) Scrooge's senses and emotions awaken, and he is "conscious of a thousand odours floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long, forgotten!" (57). While Scrooge's senses may be opening, the narrator is still in control of Scrooge's "first story" and must tell the reader what Scrooge is feeling at this point for Scrooge has not yet gained the capacity to voice his own feelings. This is also the point when Scrooge's story of his "best self" begins to become a narrative, because where there is a beginning, an end is implied.

The first spirit explains that his purpose in visiting Scrooge is the reclamation not only of his past, but of the life Scrooge could be living in the present. The Ghost of Christmas Past is wise to bring Scrooge to a happy Christmas memory of his childhood to gain Scrooge's confidence. His memory is of a time when his little sister Fanny has come to retrieve him from his cold and lonely school to bring him home for good, back to a home his sister describes as being like heaven (60). A home where Fanny excitedly exclaims: "'And you're to be a man!' said the child, opening her eyes, 'and are never to come back here'" (60). Given that Scrooge was essentially an orphan, for he was left at school during holidays as well as school times, it is no surprise that Scrooge longs for a

home. Elliot Gilbert argues in his article “The Ceremony of Innocence: Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*” that Scrooge’s one great goal was to return to his first home (27), but what is more important for Scrooge’s reclamation of his past is recognizing that he is capable of forming loving relationships. Scrooge recognizes that he yearns for more than just his physical home: he longs to reconnect with his family. He desires the personal connections of Fanny’s exuberance, the warmth of a Christmas fire, and of his parents welcoming him back in to the family.

This scene represents Scrooge’s acclamation to his feelings of wanting to belong somewhere. Scrooge lost much during his school years: the influence of his parents, the connection with his sister, a home in which to return, and a sense of the innocence of youth. This scene also connects Scrooge back to the Christmas spirit and the idea that spending time with family and friends is the true meaning of the season. Given that he has lost so much, Gilbert explains, it is clear to Scrooge that he must struggle to regain not only his past (26), but also his memories and the emotions that are tied to those memories. In remembering his past, Scrooge must labor to regain the emotions of belonging to a family, and of being loved and wanted. Scrooge has other memories involving celebratory times wherein he belonged to a “family,” including a Christmas celebration at Fezziwig’s. Scrooge’s life is a narrative wherein *all* scenes must be recognized in order for him to live the life of his “best self.” Scrooge’s “first story” is the story wherein he chooses to hold onto only the painful memories so that he may distance himself from humankind. Allowing all sorts of scenes and memories, both bad and good,

provides Scrooge the ability to replace a “bad narrative” of sadness and loneliness with a “second story” that is more of a connected, human narrative.

In another happy memory he visits with the Ghost of Christmas Past, Scrooge is reminded of another family of which he was a part: that of his mentor, Mr. Fezziwig. As Scrooge remembers Fezziwig’s Christmas celebration, he acts “like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self” (64). Scrooge immerses his heart and soul into remembering the lightness and warmth of the occasion, and “he corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation” (64). Scrooge remembers what it felt like to belong and to be connected to others, and in opening his heart just a little, he begins to recognize that he longs to be part of the “human community.”

This scene is also important because Scrooge learns that spending a little money on others can make one happy. Scrooge’s duty in life in his “first story” revolves around hoarding money because he had none as a child. Scrooge’s theory that a person cannot be happy while spending money, especially on others, is completely debunked as he watches the joy that the Fezziwigs receive from throwing a little party. Scrooge wisely observes about Fezziwig that, “He has the power to render us happy or unhappy, to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count ‘em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune” (64). Scrooge understands Fezziwig has the power over his guests because of his kindness and hospitality, and not because of his money. Scrooge himself has a fortune, however, he

lacks happiness and friendship, and because of his memory of Fezziwig, Scrooge begins to understand that one can have money, spend money on others, and receive happiness all at the same time.

As Scrooge begins to feel more and more emotion while visiting his past, he is able to gain more and more words to begin explaining himself. Scrooge's transition from his "first story" theme of "Bah! Humbug!" to the wise observation of Fezziwig is the beginning of Scrooge taking control of his personal narrative and of the "second story." The more meaningful personal relationships Scrooge forms, and the more he reconciles with his past, the more language he will gather that will allow himself to express his own story.

While Scrooge sees the happiness that sharing a person's wealth can bring, he is also reminded of the hurt that being obsessed with money causes. In another scene Scrooge visits with the Ghost of Christmas past, Belle remembers the promise she and Scrooge made to each other when they were both poor. Belle remarks, "Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. You *are* changed. When it was made, you were another man" (65). Belle's hope was that although they were both poor they would be able to find richness and wealth in their love. Scrooge's belief was that happiness was only to be found through financial gains. Belle lacks money but is rich in understanding, especially when it comes to memories, and she explains to Scrooge, "You may--the memory of what is past half makes me hope you will--have pain in this. A very, very brief time, and you will dismiss the recollection of it, gladly, as an unprofitable

dream, from which it happened well that you awoke. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!” (66). Belle’s wisdom is evident in this scene because she puts the gravity of their relationship into terms Scrooge can most relate to, when she says that he will remember their relationship something like a business deal, something that was “unprofitable” and therefore, something that was undesirable for him. She realizes that Scrooge is choosing to have a relationship with his money and not with her.

Belle, like Dickens, understands that the painful memories must reside alongside the happy ones in order for people to be completely committed to each other. Suffering is as much a part of the human experience as happiness, and one must recognize both suffering and happiness to be complete. Suffering and pain create a connection to other human beings, and the ability to be compassionate towards others creates bonds between humans. Scrooge’s inability to recognize his own suffering is denying the suffering of those around him as well, and as a result, Scrooge lacks the compassion needed to relate to the other members of the human community. In lacking compassion, Scrooge also lacks a part of his narrative which connects him to other people. He does not have the language to express compassion because he has shielded himself from pain in his adult life, and this shield prevents Scrooge from telling the tale of his present life. When the spirit takes Scrooge to Belle’s house and her husband says that on the night of Marley’s death he saw Scrooge “quite alone in the world” (68), Scrooge is pained by the vision, but his pain is the opening of his heart to relationships. His present life is isolated, lonely, cold, and yet he believes, falsely, that he is “content” because he has money. Being content with only money is a false narrative Scrooge creates because he is connecting

himself only with inanimate objects, and not with the human community, so that he will not be hurt again.

The scenes at Fezziwig's party and with Belle are examples of the embedded narratives in the story. Unlike David Copperfield who retells his own memories, Scrooge needs the help of a narrator to put words to his past. Given that Scrooge has no connection to his past he is unable to put words to his emotions at the party. That is why the narrator must step in and describe not only the scene but Scrooge's emotions as well, "[Scrooge] corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation" (64). It is the narrator's duty not only to tell of Scrooge's past emotions but also to tell the reader how Scrooge is feeling in the present moment, because just as Scrooge lacks the words to relate stories of his past, he is unable to put to words his emotions of the present. The narrator continues, "It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear" (64). The embedded narratives in "A Christmas Carol" are imperative for the reader to gain an understanding of the person Scrooge once was as well as the person he is before his conversion. The embedded narratives also help to offer the reader insight into the person Scrooge could become if he learns lessons from his memories and regains entry into humankind.

The embedded narratives are also imperative for Scrooge to gain a sense that life is made up of many different scenes. Some make us happy and some make us sad, but all of these scenes together present the narrative of our lives. The embedded narratives might

provide Scrooge with a sense that he does not have to hold on to only his painful memories because everyone has painful memories but so too do people have happy memories. The embedded narratives allow Scrooge a sense that he can supplant the “bad narrative” of his “first story” with a more human “second story.”

It is only as Scrooge begins to accept the fact that there are lessons to be learned from both good and bad memories that he can change his life and regain his connection with other people. He has much work to do, but with the arrival of the second ghost, Scrooge’s conversion is already begun, and he states, “I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it” (74). Because Scrooge equates being poor with being miserable, he must be shown that one can be rich in happiness while being poor of possessions. This is the lesson he learns from the Cratchits, and it is a bitter lesson to learn because he himself is part of their suffering. While Bob Cratchit insists on drinking to Scrooge, the founder of the family’s Christmas feast, Mrs. Cratchit cannot find it in her heart to drink to the “Ogre” of the family. She sees hardly a feast set before her family, and she knows that her husband works hard for a man who hardly recognizes his presence, much less pays him a fair wage. The narrator notes that the mention of Scrooge’s name “[casts] a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes” (83).

This scene solidifies a connection between Scrooge and the rest of humanity, and dismembers his belief that he was living his life only for himself. For even when he chose to slink around the edges of the city and of humanity, Scrooge still directly affects the

people around him. While Scrooge thinks he is content because he has money, his nephew has the insight to know this is not true and he says, “His wealth is of no use to him. He don’t do any good with it. He don’t make himself comfortable with it” (87). In Scrooge’s mind, just having the money is a comfort--he has earned the money and his duty is to keep it for himself. But seeing the generosity of Fezziwig, and through remembering his past, Scrooge “softened more and more; and he thought that if he could have listened to [the music] often, he might have cultivated the kindness of life for his own happiness with his own hands” (89). Scrooge is recognizing that his actions effect those around him, and that he has the choice to do so in a positive or negative light.

Another step in taking gaining the language needed to narrate his own story is noticing the pain of those around him, and Scrooge does this in the scene with the Ghost of Christmas past and the children of Ignorance and Want. Scrooge is not focused on himself at this point, but he sees strange beings hiding in the Ghost of Christmas Present’s skirts. Scrooge speaks, “‘Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask,’ said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit’s robe, ‘but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw!’” (92) Scrooge’s observation of the strange creatures and what could be perceived as concern for the spirit demonstrates a shift in his perspective from living only out of duty to his money to connecting to the concerns of others. Scrooge’s ability to connect with other members of humankind also expands his language as he is able to better explain and express himself. The more he can connect to others, the more he can learn compassion, and the more able

he will be to narrate his own story. This experience of questioning the spirit demonstrates Scrooge's ability to connect with and have compassion for others.

Scrooge is fortunate to be able to learn from the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come a prediction of his future. Regardless of the type of recollection Scrooge has, this vision is the most important for him because it foretells Scrooge's lonely death. When Scrooge witnesses a deceased man who is "plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for" (102) lying on his death bed, he sees himself in this poor soul. Scrooge tells the spirit "I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way, now" (102). Shuddering from head to toe, Scrooge becomes frightened, not that he will die without money, but that he will die alone. It is this realization that scares Scrooge to change.

Scrooge's moment of change comes during a moment of crisis, and this moment of crisis is something that Frank Kermode argues is necessary to provide order to life. In his critical work, *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode states, "It has been my argument that there must be a link between the forms of literature and other ways in which, to quote Erich Auerbach, 'we try to give some kind of order and design to the past, the present and the future.' One of these ways is crisis" (93). Kermode also believes that these moments of crisis can be both a beginning and an ending (96), and in Scrooge's case, this hypothesis seems to hold true. When Scrooge realizes that he does not want to live and end his life as a lonely man who is separated from society by his unfeeling heart, he is recognizing both an end and a beginning to his narrative. He is ending his isolated life based on money and the narrative of his "first story," and he is beginning to gain the

words necessary to narrate the story of his “best self” a as compassionate and connected member of society. As he transitions to his “second story,” Scrooge wears many hats and he proclaims:

‘I don’t know what to do!’ cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoon of himself with his stockings. ‘I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world. Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!’” (111)

Scrooge’s beginning connects him to both the spiritual world and humans of society, both young and old, confirming his moment of crisis has led to his change. He now has the capacity to narrate his “second story,” the story of friendship and compassion and connection and happiness--the story of living.

While Kermode describes moments of crisis as a time that can give rise to change, Ruth Glancy describes how, at Christmastime, memories of the past could come flooding back, causing a “spiritual regeneration” (54). In “Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes” Glancy explains:

Christmas was to become the time when, of all occasions in the year, memories of the past could flood back and bring about a spiritual regeneration, founded not upon the outward trappings of seasonable charity and fellowship but upon a personal and moral victory over the hardening and destructive effects of age and experience. (54)

This is the exact regeneration that Scrooge experiences when he hopes he has time to change his ways and regain membership in society. Scrooge begs the spirit for a sign that he has time to change his life before he becomes the lonely man on the bed. He vows, “I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach” (110). Scrooge’s spiritual regeneration comes with the promise that he will learn from the lessons his life and his memories have to teach him, and this change is how Scrooge comes to have the ability narrate the story of his “best self.” His duty has shifted from hoarding money to forging personal relationships.

When Scrooge does not ignore the lessons that his memories teach he remains connected to his past while living as his “best self” in the present. Scrooge can live because he has reconnected with his past and has joined that with his present life. Kermode notes the Physician Alkmeon who observed that “men die because they cannot join the beginning and the end” (4). Scrooge’s life represents the circular nature of living wherein an end can lead to a new beginning if the heart and mind are open to change. Whether Scrooge’s change is described as a moment of crisis or a spiritual regeneration, the moment of change is crucial in Scrooge’s life so that he may go on living. It is also necessary so that Scrooge can gain control of his narrative.

When Scrooge begins his journey to discover his “best self,” he lacks the language he needs to narrate his own story because he lacks the lessons of his memories and he lacks a connection to humankind. It becomes the duty of the narrator to be the reader’s guide through Scrooge’s “first story.” Peter Brooks argues that the reading of the

plot is an act of desire that carries the reader through the text (37), and the cold-hearted Scrooge character is not one who would narrate a story that the reader could care about. He is rich, he is happy to be alone with his money, yelling “Bah, Humbug!” to anyone who wishes him a Merry Christmas. Because he lacks the language that connects his past sufferings to the sufferings of those around him, his story would go no further than “Bah, Humbug” because those are the only words in Scrooge’s limited vocabulary of his “first story.” He thinks so little of himself at this point in his story that he is limited to pushing others away with his harsh words.

Like Scrooge touches the elbow of the ghosts to transport him along his journey, the heterodiegetic narrator is as close to the reader as his/her own elbow. Slater remarks that this closeness is important because it makes the reader feel like he is an intimate, setting the tone for the story to be one of “a jolly, kind-hearted bachelor uncle, seated across the hearth from his hearers on some festive domestic occasion” (20). The discourse of the third-person heterodiegetic narrator is one that is very intimate and very close to the reader. The narrator provides personal insight and emotions that Scrooge lacks.

The closeness of the narrator is also important because the closer the narrator feels for the reader, the more apparent it becomes how lost Scrooge is in his personal narrative. Scrooge really only has two resounding words in his “first story”--Bah! Humbug! and it takes visits from the spirits to guide Scrooge into his own words. Scrooge’s story is different from the other two characters in this thesis because his personal narrative is only beginning at the end of the story. Scrooge’s conversion and his

promises to raise Bob's salary and to bring warmth to the office are almost unbelievable, and so the narrator must have the last say in Scrooge's story in order to add a sense of credibility to Scrooge's story. Perhaps Scrooge has not completely gained all of the words he needs to narrate how truly grateful his heart is feeling, so the narrator steps in to provide a final observation for Scrooge, "His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him" (118). The laughter of Scrooge's heart is the beginning of his "second story" and the story of his "best self."

Another example of the narrator giving voice to Scrooge is when Scrooge witnesses the lonely death of the man with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. It is the narrator who notes, "It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand WAS open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender; and the pulse was a man's" (102). This statement explains the situation of the dead man not only to the reader, but to Scrooge as well, though "no voice pronounced these words in Scrooge's ears, and yet he heard them when he looked upon the bed" (103). Scrooge lacks the voice to express this thought, but because the thought is planted into Scrooge's head (and into the reader's reading by the narrator), Scrooge is prompted to consider the situation at hand and his own future.

The role of the narrator is to provide a sort of voice for Scrooge, and the gathering of Scrooge's memories provides a plot for the novel as well as plot for Scrooge's personal narrative. Brooks argues that there must be a beginning, a middle, and an end for a story to be complete, and Scrooge's gathering of memories provides for the beginning, middle, and end of his story. If Scrooge did not learn from his memories and gather the

language he needed to narrate his own story, then there would be no “second story” of Scrooge’s “best self.” The story would be pages and pages of Scrooge counting his money and being cruel to his nephew and to Bob Cratchit. Scrooge’s ability to gather the language to tell his own story, beginning with his childhood and ending in the present, provides a plot for the narrative to follow.

By seeing the lessons of the past and present, Scrooge understands what it means to be rich in life, and by seeing his future, he learns that he does not want to die alone. These lessons give Scrooge the desire to narrate the story of his “best self”--a self whose duty it is to be connected to the community of people. Scrooge no longer wants to be on the fringe; he longs to be caught up in the mix, and when waking up on Christmas morning he “dressed himself in ‘all his best,’ and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile” (114). The lessons that Scrooge learns through his memories allow him to gain the re-admittance into the community, and when he realizes that he must live in the past, the present, and the future, he is fulfilled and has the capacity for love and compassion and he now has the ability to narrate his “second story.” Scrooge has “cured” his plot by recognizing that his “best self” is one who is a compassionate member of society who participates in his own life with as much enthusiasm as he cares for others.

Recreating meaningful relationships allows Scrooge the ability to narrate one chapter of his “best self” and gives him the tools needed to tell his “second story.” In another chapter of his “second story,” Scrooge discovers the innocence he lost as a child

because he takes on the burden of his poverty. Scrooge declares “I am quite a baby” as he laughs “a long line of brilliant laughs” (112). This could be a description of the tone for Scrooge’s discourse. While the third-person narrator was one who took the tone of a jovial uncle, Scrooge’s discourse might adopt the tone of a giddy child who takes pleasure in every encounter and every action. Gilbert believes that Scrooge is longing for the infantile sense of being one with the universe and that he seeks to recover his lost innocence, and that “this is the rationale of his miserliness, a miserliness that we must therefore see not as a sign of his depravity but rather as an indication of how passionate is his desire to recover his lost innocence” (27). Scrooge’s recovery of innocence becomes apparent when he suddenly does not care what others think of him, because he has found happiness for himself. The narrator relates Scrooge’s happiness to the reader, saying, “Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset...His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him” (116-18). Scrooge’s language of his “best self” is child-like laughter, and in living his “best self,” Scrooge is once again connected to those around him.

Another part of the narrating of his story involves Scrooge’s relationship with Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchit’s ailing son. In Scrooge’s travels to the future, he witnesses not only his own death, but he also learns that Tiny Tim dies too. The juxtaposition of the loving family that grieves for the dead boy alongside the death of a very lonely man allows Scrooge to see that he has a chance to change his life and he realizes that he does

not have to die alone. Scrooge is so fond of Tiny Tim that he adopts him, and in this adoption, he gains part of his life back, specifically, he regains his childhood. Tiny Tim allows Scrooge to enjoy the friendships and lightheartedness he lacked as a child while reconnecting Scrooge to the childhood he dreamed of. The relationship between Scrooge and Tiny Tim also solidifies Scrooge's place in society: "He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world" (116).

Scrooge is not able to transform into his "best self" alone, but with the help of the ghosts who transport him to his past and his angel on Earth, Tiny Tim, Scrooge is able to transform into his "best self." In *Pope, Dickens, and Others: Essays and Addresses* John Butt notes that in order for the lost, dark character of Dickens's novels to be "released from his unhappy bondage of past memories by accepting the bad with the good [...] each is released by the intervention of a 'good angel', one of the 'simply meek' who in Dickens have always something to teach the 'worldly wise'" (144). This meek angel who changes Dickens's life is Tiny Tim. His role in the story is limited when it comes to dialogue but his impact on the reader and Dickens are extraordinary. By supporting Tiny Tim and his family and making their financial burdens less, Scrooge is able to gain not only a sense of community but the love of a family. Scrooge's duty shifts from keeping the money to himself to, as Dickens suggests in the true definition of Christmas, a "cheerful discharge of duty, kindness and forbearance!" (*A Christmas Carol* 249).

Scrooge's dramatic transformation is one that scholars, such as Edmund Wilson and Elliot Gilbert, have debated. Wilson and Gilbert have very differing opinions

regarding the “success” of Scrooge’s conversion. Wilson’s notion, explained in “Dickens: The Two Scrooges,” is that Scrooge’s conversion is not believable because if the reader were to follow Scrooge’s character further into the future, the reader would find that “unquestionably [Scrooge] would relapse when the merriment was over--if not while it was still going on--into moroseness, vindictiveness, suspicion. He would, that is to say, reveal himself the victim of a manic-depressive cycle, and a very uncomfortable person” (297). Gilbert disagrees, stating that Scrooge’s “life quest” was for a return to lost innocence and the lost wholeness of his infancy, and that his emotions should not be dismissed at the “pure giddiness” of a manic-depressive personality, but one that is a testament to Scrooge’s most “persistent ambition” (28). Gilbert notes that Scrooge is looking to return to a state of “wholeness” (28), and that is what his relationship with Tim brings him. Stone attributes this sudden change to the fairy tale structure Dickens often employed in his Christmas writings. Stone explains:

‘[Dickens] could make his characters and events real when he wished them real, magical when he wished them magical. He could effect overnight conversions which could be justified aesthetically...And he could deal with life in terms of a fairy-tale logic which underscored both the real and the ideal.’ (495)

What is important to remember is that Dickens created a work of fiction, and in the fictional world, anything is possible. Scrooge’s immediate change is intended to provide a lesson to the reader that anyone is capable of change, and is a story that the reader can enjoy.

Scrooge gains much during his journey to his “best self” and each lesson learned is key to being able to gain the tools necessary to author his “second story.” He gains memories of his past and learns that both good times and bad times make a complete life story. He gains the ability to relate to others through suffering and compassion, and as a result, he gains the language he needs to narrate his own story. He gains readmission into society, he adopts the family he felt he was excluded from as a child, and he reconnects with his nephew to create a relationship to his immediate family. Scrooge looks forward to the future with an open heart, and does not fear a lonely death. As noted by George Ford in “Dickens and the Voices of Time,” Dickens wrote in a letter, “I converted Mr. Scrooge by teaching him that a Christian heart can not be shut up in itself, but must live in the Past, the Present, and the Future, and must be a link of this great human chain, and must have sympathy with everything” (quoted in Ford 439). Dickens thought that the lessons that Scrooge teaches the reader are more important than the analysis of his change, and the story of Scrooge’s “best self” is more important than the anatomy of his transformation.

The insight Scrooge gains from the lessons of his memories allow him readmission to humankind. The reader can sense that Scrooge is perhaps almost ready to fully take over the story of his “best self,” but the story does not end with his own words. He is new to his own discourse and he still relies on the third-person narrator to close out his story. The narrator closes with: “He had no further intercourses with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May

that be truly said of us, and all of us!” (118) Scrooge has indeed changed and he now has the ability to narrate his own story, but Dickens has yet to turn the story over fully to him.

With the help of a close narrator who tells Scrooge’s “first story” of isolation and of a past that is forgotten, Scrooge is able to transform into a caring member of humankind and he is able to begin to author the “second story” of his “best self.” This transition allows the narrative to transform from one that was controlled by the heterodiegetic narrator to a narrative of personal growth being authored by a homodiegetic narrator in Scrooge himself. It is only once Scrooge can master the “restorative” powers that his memories contain (Glancy 57) is he able to create the story of his “best self” wherein his heart laughs and he remembers to hold the spirit of Christmas close everyday. And just as a child begins to communicate by learning a few words at a time, Scrooge is also learning the language of his “second story.” Readers may not completely see Scrooge narrating his “second story” but with the tools given to him by the ghosts, and the embedded narratives of his life, the reader can be assured that Scrooge has the tools to begin the narrative of his “second story.”

Chapter 2

David Copperfield: The Transformation of a Scrambled Soul into a “Best Self”

Charles Dickens often wrote of his fondness of memories to his friend John Forster. Whether Dickens was writing about his memory of being a three-year-old boy, of laying on the floor of his grandfather’s house wrapped in sheepskin, or of a boyhood Christmas tree, Dickens believed memories to be very powerful. In *The Life of Charles Dickens*, Forster explains Dickens’ belief that “the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy, and [Dickens] thinks that the recollection of most of us can go farther back into such times than many of us suppose” (1:4). Memories were more than fancy to Dickens, and he infused similar beliefs into the character of David Copperfield, who claims the characteristics of being “a child of close observation” and of being a man with a “strong memory of my childhood” (19). But David’s memories of his past are so strong that he makes it his duty in life to recreate his happy childhood. In holding his memories too close, David’s “first story” is incomplete because he cannot see his duty should be to create new memories learned from lessons of his past. When he learns to live his life in the present with the lessons of his past left in the past, David is able to tell the story of his “best self.” David’s “second story” is one where the adult David retrospectively gathers his memories and the lessons they hold while looking towards his future.

The narration and discourse in *David Copperfield* are very different from “A Christmas Carol.” There is a switch from a heterodiegetic narrator to a homodiegetic

narrator. David is the source of his stories and his telling the stories is the discourse of the narrative. His act of writing his stories becomes part of the story as well. Where Scrooge lacked the language to narrate his own story, David retrospectively narrates his own stories while writing them down. While David is able to describe to the reader his own path to change (where Scrooge required the visions of the ghosts in order to take control of his narrative), David's narrative is not necessarily complete with his "second story." David's homodiegetic retrospective narrative is an example of what J. Hillis Miller describes as the "incomplete circle or spiral form taken by temporality in fiction" ("Three Problems of Fictional Form" 33). The possibility of David having a "third story" is discussed later in this chapter.

Just as the narrators differ between "A Christmas Carol" and *David Copperfield*, the ways in which the characters live with their memories is also different. Whereas Ebenezer Scrooge wants nothing to do with his memories, David Copperfield is quite the opposite, and he becomes obsessed with gathering and reliving as many memories as possible. David's obsession with reliving memories is especially focused on his happy childhood times. The memory of the child, in David's opinion, is "quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy" (19). As William Lankford observes in his critical essay "'The Deep of Time': Narrative Order in *David Copperfield*," David associates memory and the "power of observation" with the "primal experience of childhood" (455). David clings to the memories of his childhood because childhood is a time when he is especially attuned with the world around him, and he is not distracted by the worries of adulthood. But more than just remembering the past, according to Lankford, David must create a connection

between childhood innocence and adult experience (456). David returns to his childhood home and to the graves of his parents to reflect on his life, and because he has no parents to rely on to guide him as he matures into an adult, he relies on the memories of his past to help him create an identity. During one of his visits home David remembers,

For my own part, my occupation in my solitary pilgrimages was to recall every yard of the old road as I went along it, and to haunt the old spots, of which I never tired. I haunted them, as my memory had often done, and lingered among them as my younger thoughts had lingered when I was far away...

My reflections at these times were always associated with the figure I was to make in life, and the distinguished things I was to do. My echoing footsteps went to no other tune, but were as constant to that as if I had come home to building my castle in the air at a living mother's side. (273)

David's desire to recreate his past leads him to a duty to his mother. David's need to recreate his childhood also gives him a sort of "timeless" perspective on life. Because he is always looking to recreate his happy memories, he is hoping that time will stand still when he is happy. This hope for timelessness prevents David from learning life lessons in his memories and creates a false "first story."

Personal relationships are linked to David's memories, and one of the first close relationships he remembers is with his mother, Clara. David remembers Clara with her pretty hair and her youthful shape (18), of her dancing in the parlor, and her resting on a chair twirling her curls around her fingers (22). David thought of his mother not as an

adult and protector, but more of his equal. Upon his return from his stay with the Peggotty's at Yarmouth, David remembers that he thought little of his childhood home. But as he returns, he recalls the emotions he has for his home and his mother. He says, "But I was no sooner turned towards [my home], than my reproachful young conscience seemed to point that way with a steady finger; and I felt, all the more for the sinking of my spirits, that it was my nest, and that my mother was my comforter and friend" (42). But even more connective for David than his mother's prettiness or friendship is their emotional connection. In "The Emotional Matrix of *David Copperfield*," Vereen Bell explains how David and his mother share the same uncomplicated emotions and pleasures, and that David's childhood is blissful because he is sharing it with a mother who is a child much like himself, "for David there is no essential difference between [he and his mother], between what they both know and expect of life. They have nothing to do but choose among simple pleasures" (639). David as a child is happy, he is secure because of the comfortable, warm home he shares with his mother. Bell goes on to say, "Their emotions, their pleasures, are uncomplicated; feeling and tender affection are free and open" (639).⁶

⁶ In his childhood home, David's mother established a world sheltered from the worries of real life. David associates his home as their own "Garden of Eden"--a perfect place of happiness and comfort. Murdstone's arrival shatters this image when he gives the responsibility of the house to his sister, who removes the happiness and replaces it with rules and beatings. In "Narrative Complexity in *David Copperfield*," Felicity Hughes argues that the death of David's mother does not touch him so profoundly because the idea of the home David and his mother had together was ruined (92). It was only ruined until David could try to recreate the happiness of his childhood home in his marriage home with Dora.

When David's mother dies and his happiness and comfort are lost, David must face the reality of growing into a man without the guidance of his mother. David's grief and his fear of the future cause him to ponder what might become of his life,

I can recollect, indeed, to have speculated, at odd times, on the possibility of my not being taught any more, or cared for any more; and growing up to be a shabby moody man, lounging an idle life away, about the village; as well as on the feasibility of my getting rid of this picture by going away somewhere, like the hero in a story, to seek my fortune: but these were transient visions, day dreams I sat looking at sometimes, as if they were faintly painted or written on the wall of my room, and which, as they melted away, left the wall blank again. (120)

Given that David feels his future is bleak and blank, he returns to the only time when he was truly happy--his childhood--and attempts to recreate his happy memories of this time.

As an adult, David attempts to recreate his childhood, which leaves him living with a false sense of himself. Lankford describes how "David's deep feeling for the past leads him to idealize childhood and to moralize memory because it makes him a child again" (453). For most of his adult life, David strives to relive his childhood, because in doing so, he can avoid the responsibilities of adulthood and the pains that come with them. An important place he "creates" in his "first story" where he can always be a child

is a place like the garden of his youth, which is a sort of Garden of Eden.⁷ David describes the garden of his childhood and the beauty of his mother in the same recollection,

Now I am in the garden at the back...a very preserve of butterflies, as I remember it, with a high fence, and a gate and padlock; where the fruit clusters on the trees, riper and richer than fruit has ever been since, in any other garden, and where my mother gathers some in a basket, while I stand by, bolting furtive gooseberries, and trying to look unmoved. We are playing in the winter twilight, dancing about the parlor. When my mother is out of breath and rests herself in an elbow-chair, I watch her winding her bright curls round her fingers, and straightening her waist, and nobody knows better than I do that she likes to look so well, and is proud of being pretty. (21-2)

In an attempt to recreate his childhood and a specific memory of his mother in the garden near their home, gardens become symbolic places where David attempts to store the

⁷ In support of the argument that *David Copperfield* is an autobiographical work of Dickens, the connection between the idealized garden that David recreates and the importance of garden memories to Dickens can be made. In *Dickens: A Biography*, Fred Kaplan tells the story of one of Dickens's earliest childhood memories, occurring at age two, when Dickens was in a "small front garden" where he and his older sister were being watched by a nurse (19). Kaplan goes on to assert that from this story three motifs emerge that become important in almost all of Dickens's fiction: that of the woman who was the nurse protector providing food but also had the means to take that same food away (representing depravation); that of the nourishing food, and of the need to "have more" like *Oliver Twist*; and that of the sister-wife who represents the "ideal woman and the completion of the self" (19). The third motif of the ideal woman certainly applies to *David Copperfield* and will be discussed in more detail through his relationships with Emily, Dora, and Agnes.

happy memories of his youth and to “re-grow” them and refit them into his adult life. In *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*, Catherine Robson describes this recreation of the “garden,” “such retrospective imagining of the early years of life as a paradise of innocence and purity not only placed an absolute line of division between childhood and adulthood, but also declared that same adulthood to be a time of postlapsarian guilt and gloom” (8). The loves of his life are like flowers David gathers for their beauty, and David does his best to plant his relationships into the carefree re-created garden of his youth.

One of the first relationships he attempts to plant in his figurative garden is with Emily, the daughter of Mr. Peggotty. Emily is the first character who plays a role in story of David’s “lost self” wherein he recreates his youth. David sees in the youthful Emily a happiness and carefree attitude that is very much like his mother’s. He dreams of their marriage as being as carefree as the time he spends in the garden with his mother:

What happiness (I thought) if we were married, and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, laying down our heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried by the birds when we were dead! Some such picture, with no real world in it, bright with the light of our innocence, and vague as the stars afar off, was in my mind all the way. (131)

In the same way that David wishes to remain in the garden of his youth with his mother, with Emily he tries to stop time and always remain happy and carefree in the fields. And although David recognizes that there is no “real world” in his daydream of marrying Emily, his pull to relive his childhood is so strong that he prefers a lost life of a dream versus the best life of his real present. David’s need to relive his past in the present explains how, according to Robin Gilmour in “Memory in *David Copperfield*,” “the past exists in a dynamic and subversive relationship to the present: it is both something which David outgrows, the background to his success, and also an inner landscape to which he returns compulsively” (31). As long as he returns compulsively to this childhood memory David will always be dutiful to recreating his past and he will always be stuck in his “first story.”

While David is originally drawn to Emily because she is an orphan, he falls in love with her because of her youthfulness and lightness. David sees a being who is a “light, bold, fluttering little figure” who is full of rashness and wildness (38). David is sure “that [he] loved that baby quite as truly, quite as tenderly, with greater purity, and more disinterestedness” (39) than he imagines he could love as a more experienced man, and thus, their relationship is born. But the relationship never matures and David feels as if time has stopped forever: “Time had not grown up himself yet, but were a child too, and always at play” (39). He and Emily have no future; David makes no plans for them growing older and they remain suspended in his infatuation for her. David creates an image of Emily that is frozen in this moment, and he makes no provisions for the future because they can have no future together. This fairy-tale story David has created is one

that is not his “best self” because it is not who he is *now*; it is an imaginative story where David’s “I-then” child-like character is alienating himself from his adult “best self.” His “best self” is one who would live in the present and would recognize his mortality, who would recognize that he must have a job to support Emily, that they might have children, and that they would grow old and someday die. David’s relationship with Emily can only be successful while he remains in Yarmouth, but when David must return to the real world and his step-father’s house, his fantasy is shattered.

One of the embedded narratives in *David Copperfield* is the story of his time working at Murdstone and Grinby’s, the blackening house David’s step-father sends him to after his mother’s death. David’s fantastical “first story” of remaining childlike with Emily and running through the fields of Yarmouth is shattered by the harsh reality that he is alone in the world and he must find a way to survive. David’s step-father likens this survival to a “fight in the world” (135) and immediately after the announcement that he will be going to work, David is unsure of how to feel about the situation. David remembers at the time, “Though I quite understood that the purpose of this announcement was to get rid of me, I have no distinct remembrance whether it pleased or frightened me. My impression is, that I was in a state of confusion about it, and, oscillating between the two points, touch neither” (136). While the adult David reflects onto this seemingly confusing state, once David is banished to the blackening house he is sure of his pain and suffering.

Working at Murdstone and Grinby’s is a troubling time that is dark and cold compared to the carefree garden of David’s youth, and the carefree time he shared with

Emily. This embedded narrative is serious in nature and the language turns dark. David has had time as an adult to reflect on this story and time in his life, and because of this reflection he is able to put into grown-up words the emotions he had as a child. David begins to try to explain his pain, but notes, “No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk unto this companionship” (137). As his time at the blackening house drags on and he is forced to care for and provide for himself, David’s world is dark and lonely. David explains his pain,

The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. (137-8)

Given that he has lost his mother, his childhood home, the garden that was so dear to him, his beloved nurse Peggotty, and his schooling, David’s need to cling to his past and recreate and control his future is understandable. The “I-then” character of David has experienced two very different “stories” at this point in his youth: he creates a false “first story” in trying to recreate his carefree childhood with Emily, and has faced the harsh reality of growing up without parents. And given that his soul was almost crushed in the blackening house, it is sure that David will do everything he can to cling to a story that is more comfortable and carefree, even if he is not living as his “best self.” In an attempt to escape the horrible conditions of the blackening house his step-father has sent him to

work in and his lonely, isolated existence, David resolves to create a new story, and he runs away to his only living relation, his aunt Betsey Trotwood.

Although his aunt abandoned him at his birth, David clings to the hope that a future with this estranged relative will be better than a future working in the blackening house. David even creates a story in his head as he is preparing to leave the blackening house that paints his aunt in a nicer light,

I could not forget how my mother had thought that she felt her touch her pretty hair with no ungentle hand; and though it might have been altogether my mother's fancy, and might have had no foundation whatever in fact, I made a little picture out of it, of my terrible aunt relenting towards the girlish beauty that I recollected so well and loved so much, which softened the whole narrative. It is possible that it had been in my mind a long time, and had gradually engendered my determination. (155-6)

It is plain to see that David is a creator of stories in order to help him escape his pain.

Once Aunt Trotwood agrees to take David in she takes action to lead David onto his "second story." Aunt Trotwood begins by confronting David's cruel step-father, who in the beginning of his relationship with David's mother, Clara, was made of "sweetness" and painted a picture of domestic bliss: "[Murdstone] was to be another father to [David], and they were all to live together in a garden of roses, weren't they? (186) declares Aunt Clara, seeing through the lies that Murdstone created. Murdstone proved to be very different from this caring person when he turns David out of his own house to work in the

blackening house. This scene not only points out that Aunt Trotwood understood Murdstone's true nature from the start, but it also makes David aware that the image of Garden of Eden/garden of youth has been shattered. This is Aunt Trotwood's first attempt at making David see he must live in the present in order to become successful, mature, and firm.

Aunt Trotwood works in other ways to attempt to get David to leave behind his painful past so he can live in the present. First, she gives him the nickname "Trotwood" as a new identity, one that is separate from Blunderstone, the house of his youth. David no longer needs to attach who he is with the Murdstones, or his childhood home, or the blackening house. According to Gilmour, Aunt Trotwood is attempting to "wean" David from having a too-close identification with his mother's belief that "a loving heart was better and stronger than wisdom" (36). Aunt Trotwood does not bully David to change, but instead offers him a comfortable, stable life. David is more than willing to leave behind his unhappy memories at Blunderstone and his time in the workhouse. He confesses,

The two things clearest in my mind were, that a remoteness had come upon the old Blunderstone life--which seemed to lie in the haze of an immeasurable distance; and that a curtain had ever fallen on my life at Murdstone and Grinby's. No one has ever raised that curtain since. I have lifted it for a moment, even in this narrative, with a reluctant hand, and dropped it gladly. The remembrance of that life is fraught with so much pain to me, with so much mental suffering and want of hope, that I have

never had the courage even to examine how long I was doomed to lead it...I only know that it was, and ceased to be; and that I have written, and there I leave it. (188)

This excerpt indicates that David is capable of remembering his past, of feeling the hurt of his past, and then leaving the past in the past. This is an example of living well with memories: having the memory and holding onto the lessons that memory provides. Had David done this regarding his memories of his mother, he would have recognized that he cannot stop time and live his entire life as a child. And this would be an ideal place for David to being his “second story.” He has a new identity and a new family, he has left behind a childish romance, and he is well on his way to being able to live in the present and narrate the story of the new path that his life is about to take.

This transitional time in David’s life provides a chance for him to decide where he wants to take his story and which “self” he is going to be. It is during this time he meets a woman who is in many ways very much unlike his mother, but who nonetheless deeply impacts his life. When David goes to stay with Mr. Wickfield while he attends school, he meets Wickfield’s kind daughter, whose mother died when Agnes was young. David and Agnes are immediate friends and he sees a sort of old soul in her eyes: “Although her face was quite bright and happy, there was a tranquility about it, and about her--a quiet, good, calm spirit--that I never have forgotten; that I never shall forget” (194). In Agnes, David sees the stability that he does not see in Emily, and he is attracted to Agnes in a more “sisterly” way. In “The Undisciplined Heart of David Copperfield,” Gwendolyn Needham describes Agnes as the “victim of David’s romantic

sensibility...revered as an angel, beloved as a sister...he has etherealized her into a superior being, a removed spirit whose rays warm his heart and guide his path” (96). Needham goes onto explain that David’s lofty views of Agnes place her on a different plane as himself: “He associates her ‘tranquil brightness’ then and ever after with soft light shining through a church’s stained-glass window. His imagination thus colors their relationship with a religious aura that causes him to venerate her goodness and to elevate her effectually beyond his reach” (96). Although Agnes will eventually guide David on the path to his “best self,” at this point in his story she acts as more of an interlude between the story of his trying to recreate the garden of his youth and of his attempt to find comfort and stability.

Whereas David attempts to recreate the happy garden of his youth with Emily, Agnes represents something very different to David. Whereas David dreams of running through timeless fields with Emily, David sees in Agnes something more permanent and in the moment, like the stained glass of a church window. He does not remember when he saw the window, or what the scene or subject of the window, but he knows that when Agnes turns around “I thought of that window; and that I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards” (194). Agnes represents the present, a comfort and calm reflection of what David’s life *could* become if he stays with Aunt Trotwood.

While both Emily and Agnes are very different to David, they both play a role in creating his story. When David is with Emily, he is reminded of his childhood and the carefree times he had with his mother, and the “first story” he creates with Emily is the

story of lasting youthfulness and of a carefree life. When David is with Agnes, he sees stability and goodness and comfort, and the story he creates with her is filling the void of the nurse or caregiver he misses. David describes the different feelings he has for the women: “I love little Emily, and I don’t love Agnes--no, not at all in that way--but I feel that there is goodness, peace, and truth, wherever Agnes is; and that the soft light of the colored window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always, and on me when I am near her” (201). At this point in his narrative, David stands at a crossroads. He may take the side with Aunt Trotwood and Agnes, and begin a “second story” where he lives in the present, or he may continue down the path of recreating the garden of his childhood. While he may crave stability and comfort at this point with the life he could have with the mature and responsible Agnes, he is also a young man in search of love, and his heart makes the decision of which path he will take for him. David, in a way, leaves behind the comfort and stability that Aunt Trotwood and Agnes afford him to find another woman who is like his mother, so he can again return to his childhood with this woman and continue living his fantastical “first story.” He finds that in Dora Spenlow.

David’s first meeting with Dora returns him to the false story of the garden of his youth, and he continues on the lost path of his “first story.” From the first time they meet, Dora is overwhelming to David--she gives him a feeling of excitement that contrasts dramatically with the comfort and stability he feels with Agnes. He describes Dora as being “more than human...she was a Fairy, a Sylph, I don’t know what she was--any thing that no one ever saw, and everything that every body ever wanted” (331). To David’s surprise, upon meeting this sprite who immediately captures his heart, he is

introduced to her “confidential friend,” Miss Murdstone, her step-father’s sister and a woman who tormented his own mother. He feels that Miss Murdstone’s presence in Dora’s life is less that of a protector or confidante and more that of an assailant. Perhaps David’s recognition of this assault on Dora takes him back to how his mother was assaulted by the Murdstones, and in creating another false “story,” he makes it his duty to “save” Dora in a way that he could not save his mother.

David relives the carefree times of his youth during his courtship of Dora. David’s immature heart becomes infatuated with Dora as they walk in the greenhouses at her father’s house, and just as he admires his mother gathering the ripe fruit of his childhood garden, the smell of geraniums take David back to Dora’s straw hat and her dark curls. Gilmour refers to this as “memory intersecting with action,” which means “a sound, a smell, the return to a familiar place can bring instantly to life a scene or character from the past” (33). David’s association of memory to action seems to be a way in which he justifies his feelings, but it is not a way in which he is living his “best self.” David’s obsession with Dora causes him to take refuge in the thought of her, just as he wished to take refuge in the garden of his youth. David’s life becomes Dora: “...it was all Dora to me. The sun shone Dora, and the birds sang Dora. The south wind blew Dora, and the wild flowers in the hedges were all Doras, to a bud” (408). David’s undisciplined heart is excited at the thought of being allowed to worship Dora, just as he worshipped his mother

in their childhood garden. When the adult David remembers this time, he describes it as an “unsubstantial, happy, foolish time” (413).⁸

When Dora and David marry the “foolish time” of their courtship continues. David describes their house in a way that is reminiscent of the happy garden of his childhood:

Such a beautiful little house as it is, with everything so bright and new; with the flowers on the carpets looking as if freshly gathered, and the green leaves on the paper as if they had just come out; with the spotless muslin curtains, and the blushing rose-coloured furniture, and Dora’s garden hat with the blue ribbon--do I remember, now, how I loved her in such another hat when I first knew her! (530)

David’s undisciplined heart is so immature and so blinded by his urge to recreate his childhood that he can only bring the fairy tale of their relationship into a metaphorical garden of Eden in their house. He cannot imagine that he can be the master of this house because he has no idea how to be the master of a household. He has always had a woman to fill that role for him, and he must assume at this point that Dora, a “thing of light, and

⁸ It is impossible to have a discussion about David Copperfield and not talk about Gwendolyn Needham’s notion of David’s undisciplined heart. Needham describes the feeling nature of David’s character and of how he has the traits of a man of sensibility -- innocences, simplicity, gullibility, benevolence, tenderness (85). These traits combine to form his “undisciplined heart,” a term wins David affection in his relationships but also proves to be his greatest weakness (87). While Needham cites Agnes and Aunt Betsey as examples of the “disciplined heart,” David initially separates himself from these characters in order to follow the desire of his own heart, which drives him to recreate his childhood memories. Certainly, one can see that David’s heart is immature and emotional.

airiness, and joy” (459), will put into use her joy and light to maintain the beauty of their household.

David’s relationship with Dora is something almost supernatural, and he views her as an apparition in the marriage. Just as David etherealized Agnes into a “superior being,” David turns Dora into a representation of his mother, his angel on earth. David describes his wife as “the innocent figure I dearly loved” (543), and there is no doubt that David has feelings for Dora. Gilmour supports the theory that David loves Dora, and supports their marriage because Dora represents “a real link with the past of his childhood and with the intense but submerged associations of the Blunderstone world: like his mother she is a child-wife” (36). Dora may be a child-wife, but she is also a mirage in the marriage. David views Dora as the flower that replaced the beauty of his mother. Just as David stands by “to see the phantoms of those days go by me” (527), so are the images of Dora ghost-like in nature. Dora inhabits the house quietly while David is gone, and she is like a spirit that waits for him there. She comes “softly down to talk” while he eats his supper, and she seems to float in and out of the rooms of their little house. Dora earns the nicknames of “Mouse” and “Little Blossom” (537), and David’s aunt provides the advice that Dora is delicate and is like “a very tender little blossom, and the wind must be gentle with her” (538). Dora is like a blossom in David’s imaginary garden of happiness that is easily damaged by harsh realities or words.

The marital home of David and Dora is not the content and ordered gardens of their courtship where flowers blossomed and butterflies fluttered, and Dora’s unruly housekeeping practices cause a “scrambled household” (Needham 100). David must be

the “man of the house” and earn money, and therefore he does not have time for the “wifely” duties of managing the house and the servants. Yet Dora, like his mother, is too much of a child to run the house properly. David is not fortunate enough to have a capable housekeeper like his former nurse Peggotty to run his house. Neither he nor Dora know how to keep a house, manage servants, host dinner parties, or perform any of the other responsibilities that come with managing a house. As a result, the “Little Blossom” begins to fade, and David himself begins to question what he longs for in a wife and in his life.

David realizes that what he wants in life is not a child-wife, but a wife who counsels and supports him. Although he ponders this point, he never fully gives himself permission to realize or accept that his “best self” is worthy of the life, or the wife, he desires. David recollects:

When I walked alone in the fine weather, and thought of the summer days when all the air had been filled with my boyish enchantment, I did miss something of the realisation of my dreams; but I thought it was a softened glory of the Past, which nothing could have thrown upon the present time. I did feel, sometimes, for a little while, that I could have wished my wife had be my counsellor; had had more character and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me; but I felt as if this were an unearthly consummation of my happiness, that never had been meant to be, and never could have been. (545)

David's declaration of things that were never meant to be and never could have been is further indication that he is not living well in the present. David will not be able to begin to live life as his "best self" or begin to narrate his "second story" until he recognizes that the glory of his past does, and must, influence his present life, but the glory must do so in a way that keeps it in the past. The best life David lives is not one that is a recreation of his past, but one that is based on utilizing lessons learned from his memories in order to master his past and live his best present life.

This scene also reflects the power recollected stories have in a person's life. It is not until David is a grown adult and removed from the emotions he feels while he is living with Dora that he can come to terms with this time in his life and adequately describe his desires and wants. He might have realized in this moment in his life that he needed and wanted something different than Dora, but he might not have had the words to know that person was a counselor. David is looking back from a time where his current wife Agnes is more of a counselor than Dora was, and now that he has had both sorts of relationships he is better equipped to put words to his desires.

The "uncomfortable" housekeeping situation is not all that is disheveled in David's life. As the previous passage exemplifies, David is beginning to feel the change in his heart. Bell argues that it is not enough to explain the previous passage by simply saying that David "missed" or "wanted" something, or someone. Bell suggests that this passage indicates that David has discovered a conflict between what he wants--Dora, and what he needs--Agnes (643). Bell goes on to explain, "By extension he wants a world where the simplicity and the innocence of childhood--the *better* state preceding

manhood'--are perpetual; instead, he must settle for the world as it is, and in this world he needs not a loving baby, a fairy sprite, or a child-bride, but a sober counsellor, a guide, an intellectual companion" (643).

What David might need in this world is Agnes, but what he has is Dora, and for the first time, he is forced to live his life in the present. He realizes that he cannot change Dora, and that he must "adapt myself to Dora; to share with her what I could, and be happy; to bear on my own shoulders what I must, and be happy still" (588). By adapting himself to the life Dora needs him to live he is again living a "lost life"--one meant to protect Dora from the real world. David admits to his mistakes in believing he could always protect Dora, "For I knew, now, that my own heart was undisciplined when it first loved Dora; and that if it had been disciplined, it never could have felt, when we were married, what it had felt in its secret experience" (588). David is less a part of the real world and is more a part of a fictional world where Dora is like a flower in his garden and his only responsibility is to protect her from grown-up responsibilities. But as time goes by, David sees the toll the life he has created is taking on Dora, and it is literally taking her life. David does not want to admit that he will soon lose Dora just like he lost his mother, but one night he recognizes "how the blossom withered in its bloom upon the tree!" (590).

Only after Dora's death, when the artificial "garden" that was his marriage has been uprooted, does David truly recognize that his soul is empty because he has been living a false "first story." Up to this point, David's "first story" was an attempt to relive and recreate the happy memories of his childhood through his marriage to Dora. But

David always had a suspicion that there was more to his life, that there was a partner that he was missing. The partner and counsellor he is missing is Agnes, the woman who represents comfort and stability for him. David cannot remember at what point he recognized that he had thrown away Agnes's love, but it was during a time when "I had no purpose, no sustaining soul within me, anywhere" (685). At this point, David is not living with his memories at all. He has no story at all, and he is empty.

It is at this point in David's narrative that he must make a choice: to continue living in the fantasies of the past and risk losing his narrative because he can no longer find the words to describe his life, or to live in the present moment with his memories in his past and continue on with a new "second story" narrating the details of his adult life. It takes David completing his "Story" (687) before he can clearly see that he has been living his life in the wrong way. He must write down his "first story" in order to see the err of his ways and in order to find in his heart what he desires. It is only when he can put the past behind him that he can discipline his heart and begin to narrate his "second story."

David's heart begins to heal when he remembers his past with Agnes and he contemplates his return to England. The transformation of David's soul from being scrambled and lost in the past into something that is content in the present begins to happen right where he wishes to record the story of his life:

In the beginning of the change that gradually worked in me, when I tried to get a better understanding of myself and be a better man, I did glance, through some definite probation, to a period when I might possibly hope

to cancel the mistaken past, and to be so blessed as to marry [Agnes]. But, as time wore on, this shadowy prospect faded, and departed from me. If she had ever loved me, then, I should hold her the more sacred; remembering the confidences I had reposed in her, her knowledge of my errant heart...Whatever I might have been to her, or she to me, if I had been more worthy of her long ago, I was not now, and she was not. The time was past. I let it go by...(688)

This passage is very confessional and cathartic for David, for he recognizes many things: that his heart was immature, that he attempted unsuccessfully to cancel the past once his heart was broken by Dora's death, and that he has to live with the realization that he can learn lessons from his past. However painful, David begins to see that the past can provide lessons in life without being duplicated in the present. Looking back and taking those lessons to heart allows him to leave behind his false story and begin living his life as his "best self." David also begins to recognize that while lessons from his past can be integrated into his life in the present, he must let his past go by.

David does return to England and he does marry Agnes, but just as importantly, he learns to live in the present. David's "cure for the plot," as coined by Peter Brooks, is also the cure for finding his "best self:" his duty now is to create new memories in the present with his wife and partner, Agnes. David recalls the journey he has completed in finding his "best self":

And now, as I close my task, subduing my desire to linger yet, these faces fade away. But, one face, shining on me like a Heavenly light by which I see all other objects, is above them and beyond them all. And that remains. I turn my head, and see it, in its beautiful serenity, beside me. My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company.

O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward! (737)

This quote summarizes David's journey to his "best self." he is living in the present with Agnes as his partner. His "second story" is one wherein the faces of his past fade away, and he looks towards his future, and more specifically, his death, with Agnes by his side.

What makes David's narrative voice an interesting one is that he is clear about who his audience is. David finds much benefit in reviewing one's life and David's chosen audience for his life review is for his own eyes. David waits until the last third of the novel to reveal his intended audience to the reading audience, giving the reading audience time to become familiar with David's story. In becoming familiar with his story, the audience grows to trust his reliability as a narrator because David tells the stories of his own sufferings and his own growth. Once the reader learns that David has been writing for himself, a sense that he did not exaggerate in order to impress his audience emerges. David has written these memories for himself, as a record of his own personal growth.

Brooks comments that in order for change or progress to occur, the past must be recognized as the past within the present (134), and this is exactly the change that occurs in David. He is no longer the silly young boy who lives only in the moment. Nor does he try to stop time in his life and his relationships by attempting to recreate his childhood. David has had a lifetime of experiences to reflect upon, and in gathering the lessons of his past he has matured his heart. David learns that his past is part of him, but that it must remain in the past. It is only when David looks back with a mature heart that he can fully learn what his memories were trying to teach him.

David's recognition of the past as past allows him to be able to reflect on himself and to write about his past, but it also places him in a precarious position of being two "selves." In *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, Dorrit Cohn explains how this phenomenon of dual selves is not always problematic. Certainly, David has changed from the immature, restless man who wished to relive his past into a more mature, settled man who now relies on his past for the lessons he learns from his memories. Although the narrating David, the changed David of "now" is different from the David of the "past," that is not to say that the narrating David can completely forget who he was in the past. Instead he must be both the David then and the David now. Cohn describes David's current state of being as one that will always be connected to his "old self," "even when a narrator becomes a 'different person' from the self he describes in his story, his two selves still remain yoked by the first-person pronoun" (144). David's "I-then" of his past is the "lost self" he lived while trying to

recreate his childhood--or his "first story." The "I-now" of the present is living well with his memories and keeping the past in the past and represents David's "second story."

David provides the reader clues as to when he is using his "I-then" story as opposed to the observations he is making as an "I-now" adult. The following paragraph is an example of how David melds the two voices together:

I lay down in the old little bed in the stern of the boat, and the wind came moaning on across the flat as it had done before. But I could not help fancying, now, that it moaned of those who were gone; and instead of thinking that the sea might rise in the night and float the boat away, I thought of the sea that had risen, since I last heard those sounds, and drowned my happy home. I recollect, as the wind and water began to sound fainter in my ears, putting a short clause into my prayers, petitioning that I might grow up to marry little Em'ly, and so dropping lovingly asleep. (127)

The "I-then" David remembers that he was lulled to sleep by the sounds of the sea. The "I-now" David adds that the sea was moaning of those who had gone. The "I-then" David thought the sea might rise and float the boat away; the "I-now" David knows that his happy home was lost because his mother had married Mr. Murdstone. The passage closes with the youthful wish of the "I-then" David praying with his immature heart that he marry Emily. This passage demonstrates David's discourse through the novel as being one where the "I-then" stories can hardly be separated from the "I-now" observations. In many cases, the two are connected. In "Three Problems of Fictional Form" J. Hillis

Miller describes this phenomenon as the “interpersonal texture of [the] novel [being] made up of the superimposition of two minds, the mind of the adult David reliving his experiences as a child...the older narrator, from the vantage of a later time, watches his younger self engage himself more or less naively in relations to other people” (32).

Critics have discussed how the narrator functions and what that narrator’s role is in the telling of his or her personal past. Unlike “A Christmas Carol,” the narration of *David Copperfield* is in the first-person; David narrates his own story.⁹ Lankford believes that David’s work as the narrator is to undertake the task of creating a sort of “net” while weaving his memories together in a coherent and continuous pattern which requires discipline as “David returns to his past in memory and departs from it again in the act of narration” (456). Given the inherently intrusive nature of memories this task is not simple. David as narrator must be focused and organized in order to produce a cohesive narrative to the reader. This organization is key, for according to D.A. Miller in *The Novel and the Police*, without the organizing presence of David as narrator, “the world might fall back into disconnected fragments,” (155), and so too might David’s own narrative become disconnected and disjointed. David’s role of narrator requires that he have control over the organization of his memories so that the narrative movement is organized.

⁹ The fact that David narrates his own tale has left room for much critical discussion. Gwendolyn Needham notes that many critics have accused Dickens of creating another flat character in *David Copperfield*. Percy Lubbock, for example, argues that it little matters how David’s mind works because his only function in the novel is for the reader to see what David sees (quoted in Needham 83). G.K. Chesterton echoes Lubbock’s concerns, and Needham argues against both opinions stating that David’s growth and maturation help to shape the selection and arrangement of the novel as a whole (83).

Once David has control of his memories, the narrative does not necessarily come full circle. J. Hillis Miller notes that David's homodiegetic narrative exemplifies the "incomplete circle or spiral taken by temporality in fiction" (33). Certainly, through the narrating of his story and gaining the power to tell his "second story," David has changed from a character trying to relive his past to a character who, according to Miller "looks towards the future on the basis of a clear understanding of the past and makes a decision about the future" (35). But David's story, according to Miller, can never come "full circle" because it is only through death that the character's story can be complete. Miller writes:

Going forward in time through a recapitulation in language of his experiences in the past, the narrator of a first-person novel returns eventually back through his past to himself in the present, but at a higher level of comprehension, it may be, than he had when he began to tell his story. The insight born of the act of retelling may lead the narrator to an authentic understanding of his life, a recognition of its hitherto hidden patterns...This revelation, however, is never complete as long as the narrator lives. The spiral is endless. (33-4)

This does not diminish the change in David's personality, nor does it imply that his "second story" is false or incomplete. Perhaps Miller's idea of the homodiegetic narrative as a spiral leaves the door open for a possible "third story." We see this in Scrooge's character as he has gained the ability to author his own narrative at the end of the story

but has not actually yet put words to his story, and we will see it in Esther's story as she leaves her "second story" open-ended.

As the homodiegetic narrator David makes decisions as to the movement of his narrative and how his narrative is arranged. Scrooge lacks this power because he lacks the language necessary to connect with humankind and to narrate his own story. David, on the other hand, is in complete control of how his memories are organized and how they are presented to the reader. David is a writer in two ways—he writes as a journalist as a means to provide for his family, but he also writes as a recorder of his memories as a way to heal and survive. David's decisions on how he orders his memories provides a sense of movement to his discourse and to the novel itself.

The act of ordering his memories also organizes David's narrative movement. David decides to start at the beginning of his life, and thus the reader also starts at the beginning of David's story with birth. The narrative then appears to move forward chronologically through David's life: the death of his mother, his time working at the blackening house, his flight to his Aunt Trotwood in Dover, his new school, his apprenticeship, his courtship of Dora, and so on. But given that David is *looking back* on his memories as an adult, the argument could be made that his narrative is ordered achronologically, more like Scrooge's narrative. David must go back into his mind and visit memories of his past much like Scrooge is visited by the spirits and taken to the memories of his past, his present, and his future. And while David's discourse is to present his memories to reader chronologically, it does not necessarily mean that he recollects his memories chronologically.

The purpose of David reliving and organizing his memories plays into Brooks's idea that narrative retraces events in order to bring them into consciousness (34). In retracing events, David also gathers the language necessary to narrate the story of his "best self." Needham also remarks on the importance of David's character and narration and says, "David's capacity for feeling, his sensitivity to the emotional tone of personal relationships, as well as his remarkable powers of observation, make his story live" (83-84). David is more than just a "pair of eyes and a memory" (130) as stated by Percy Lubbock in *The Craft of Fiction*: he is a feeling character who is narrating his story of change and his discovery of his "best self."

Gilmour also talks about narrative movement relating to David's past. He believes that David's transformation must take place in a secure present as he views a more tumultuous past:

The characteristic narrative movement in *David Copperfield* is a return from a secure present ('advanced in fame and fortune') to a less secure but more vital and complex past. Although David himself has won through, he is continually drawn back to a remembered world in which others dear to him have not: his successful emergence is tempered by the ties which bind him, in memory, to those who have suffered defeat at the hands of life.

(31)

Even though David himself has suffered, being an orphaned child sent to a blackening house, losing his first wife and having to rebuild his life, David was lucky enough to gain perspective on his life and rewrite his "second story." Those around him were not so

lucky: his mother's marriage to Murdstone brought her misery, isolation, and eventually death. Emily's elopement with Steerforth took her away from her family and her true love and led her to a life of isolation and sadness. Ham's suffering for his lost love led him to sacrifice his life to save others. Certainly David felt as though his life were ending as he mourned Dora, but his resolve to find his "second story" and the ability to write this "second story" from a place of love and companionship allowed him the strength to live as his "best self."

David begins his story with a statement about the path his narrative might take: "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show" (9). After all that David endures and overcomes--the death of his mother when he was a child; the horrible conditions at the blackening house; running away to his only relative; taking control of his life and of his education; losing the man he thought was his best friend; working to provide for his wife; losing his wife and his ability to write--one could make an argument that he deserves the title of hero on merit alone. But what makes David the hero of his story is his ability to change his heart and learn from his past while leaving his memories in the past.

Chapter III

Esther Summerson: An Individual Born of a Fragmented Past

David Copperfield and Esther Summerson share stories of lonely and sad childhoods and the events of their childhood profoundly affect the discourse of their narratives. J. Hillis Miller notes that both David and Esther had similar childhood experiences, such as solitude and deprivation and the lack of a satisfactory place within a family or society (35). Unlike David's well-documented childhood, the story of Esther's childhood is incomplete: she has no idea who her parents are, and she is confused by her godmother's accusation that she is her mother's shame. Into her adulthood Esther holds onto one painful childhood memory in particular: the time her godmother told her that she would have been better off if she had not been born. Esther's identity centers on a way to survive the effects of these harsh words: she creates a childhood vow that she carries with her through her whole life always to be good and dutiful to earn the love of others. This vow helps Esther to be a good person but it also clouds her sense of self-worth. Esther's "first story" is one that she creates wherein she is retelling the stories of others while adding her own observations, be they unworthy in her opinion. It is not until Esther begins to live her life for herself, and releases her feelings of confusion about her past and the guilt of her parents, that she begins to narrate the "second story" of her "best self." Esther's "best self" is the story of a woman a sense of being somewhere and being someone.

Unlike *David Copperfield* which has one homodiegetic retrospective narrator, there are two clear narrative components to *Bleak House*: the present-tense heterodiegetic Chancery narrative, which is pseudo-omniscient and impersonal, and Esther's first-person mostly present-tense homodiegetic narration. The Chancery narrative is confident and full of details; Esther's narrative is self-conscious and full of emotional observations. The Chancery narrative is full of stories of matters that Esther has no awareness of. It is almost as if the tone of the Chancery narrative is taking place in a completely separate city, not in the same place as Esther's narrative. These two narratives do not necessarily compete with each other because the tone of each is very different: the Chancery narrative is masculine, unemotional, descriptive, and business-like. Esther's narrative is more personal, domestic, emotional, and filled with her opinions and observations.

There is a difference between Esther and David's narratives as well. While the narrative of *David Copperfield* is retrospective, Esther's is not completely so because she knows little of her fragmented past. Scrooge and David create the discourses of their "first stories" based on the well-known stories of their childhood. Esther lacks stories of her birth and of the identity of her parents, and her childhood is very lonely and gloomy. This is the very problem of her story: her past is fragmented and incomplete and as a result, her story and discourse also feel incomplete. Esther lacks the self-confidence to tell her own story so she focuses her observation on the stories of others as a way to take attention off of herself. The very nature of how David and Esther gather and record their stories is also different. *David Copperfield* spends time arranging his stories and tells them with detail and retrospect, and this lends a more contemplative tone to his stories. It

is as though “David as Narrator” has been sitting at his desk for a long time gathering his memories, organizing his observations, and writing his story. Esther’s voice is much more conversational and does not provide as much retrospect which gives the reader a feeling of being closer to Esther and her observations. Esther’s story feels as though it has a more diary-like feel--as if the events of the story happened earlier in the day versus in the long-ago past and she sits down sooner to record them.

One of the means Esther employs to gather her stories is through her way of noticing, a way that is “not a quick way, O no!--a silent way of noticing what passed before me, and thinking I should like to understand it better. I have not by any means a quick understanding” (17). Esther observes the activities and the people around her while not passing judgment because she feels she is unworthy to do so. In the scholarly article “‘But I Cried Very Much’; Esther Summerson as Narrator,” Michael S. Kerns describes this “noticing way” in Esther’s description of characters and events: “she has the phenomenal ability to evoke not only the tangible qualities of scenes but also their intangible, emotional qualities” (123). Where Scrooge and David delve into their long-ago past, going all the way back their childhoods, to learn lessons from their memories and gain a sense of their “best self,” Esther must look to the more immediate past--the past seven years--to gain an understanding of herself and her narrative. She must be a close observer of more present occurrences in order to gather the pieces of her identity. And given that her duty in life is to serve others in order to gain their love, often she is recording the stories of other people instead of focusing on herself.

This close observation of her more immediate past lends a distinct voice to Esther's narrative. She is still close to the events on her life, and considering that she does not travel far into her past to discover her "best self," the voice and tone of her narrative is more in the present and is more conversational. What also differs about Esther's voice is who is *giving* her voice, or who is suggesting she write her own story. David's past is clear and he remembers his childhood with amazing detail while Esther has no details of her parents. David writes his own story for himself, but who is Esther writing for, and why? Kerns describes not only how Esther came to write her story but of who she is as a narrator:

We believe for the duration of the narrative that Esther is a real person rather than just a bodiless narrator. We also sense that something about her is still not quite right, despite her present-tense efforts to have us think otherwise...But if we hope to understand her as a narrator we must remember that she is being made to tell a story she does not understand and feels incapable of handling adequately. Her narration has apparently been precipitated by an event: someone has instructed her to write. (122)

Kearns makes an interesting case: if Esther was instructed to write, and her "first story" can be considered the story of the close observation of the lives of those around her, then perhaps her "second story" of her "best self" is the one where she continues to narrate about the lives of others while at the same time creating her *own* story. Kearns supports this point and explains: "the reader of Esther's narrative creates a story, or rather two: one a record of her past life as she tells it and the other a record of her fossilized development

as she reveals it in her struggle to tell the first” (128). David’s narrative tone is confident and organized and he is sure of his past and where he has been, but Esther lacks a complete understanding of her past as well as the self-confidence to write her own narrative. Additionally, she is so intimately involved in the lives of those around her that their stories are really intertwined with her own stories. The act of narration itself could in fact be Esther’s “second story.”

The tone of Esther’s “first story” is based upon one of the few memories she has of her childhood. Esther remembers, “I was brought up, from my earliest remembrance--like some of the princesses in the fairy stories, only I was not charming--by my godmother...She was a good, good woman!” (17) Esther does not mean “good” as in loving and doting and compassionate, but good as in dutiful. Her godmother attends church three times a week, she is strict and grave, and Esther always feels unworthy of her godmother’s love. Esther’s childhood was lonely and full of self-consciousness and she describes her pain,

It made me very sorry to consider how good she was, and how unworthy of her I was; and I used ardently to hope that I might have a better heart; and I talked it over very often with the dear old doll; but I never loved my godmother as I ought to have loved her, and as I felt I must have loved her if I had been a better girl.

This made me, I dare say, more and more timid and retiring than I naturally was, and cast me upon Dolly as the only friend with whom I felt at ease. (18)

Esther carries these feelings of being unworthy throughout the discourse of her narrative and these feelings attribute to the “lost self” of her “first story.”

Another memory that is etched in Esther’s mind is also instrumental in shaping the adult she becomes. One birthday, Esther pleads with her godmother to give her information about her mother, and her godmother’s reply is gloomy and painful: “It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday; that you had never been born!” (19) The few details Esther’s godmother finally reveals are sad and confusing for Esther. Her godmother tells her, “Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers...Forget your mother, and leave all other people to forget her who will do her unhappy child that greatest kindness” (19). Forgetting her mother proves difficult for Esther, and not having the key pieces of information about her mother’s identity and not fully understanding why she was her mother’s disgrace prevent Esther from having a complete notion of her childhood story. She is beginning her fragmented “first story” without a true sense of self.

As Andrew Zwedling notes in “Esther Summerson Rehabilitated,” while Esther is “wounded by her godmother’s speech...she is not crushed” (430). In place of childhood games and fancy, Esther creates a mature vow to “try, as hard as ever I could repair the fault I had been born with” by being “industrious, contented, and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one to win some love to myself if I could” (20)--a vow that Zwedling coins as her “strategy for survival” (430). In “Confusion and Consciousness in Dickens’s Esther,” Judith Wilt concurs and points out that Esther hopes to win the right to other’s love as well as her own self-love (288). Esther’s reward of the love of others

comes to her easily, but obtaining self-love is something Esther struggles with her entire life. Esther's vow and her notion that she is only worthy of love as a reward for duty creates the falseness of her "first story."

Wilt argues that being good and vowing to win the love of others is the way Esther takes control of her life despite her painful childhood. Wilt describes Esther as "[choosing] a full and flexible shape--which promotes alike the doing and the winning, the loving and the being loved, the seeing and the being recognized" (288). In this respect, the vow that Esther creates is like an outline for the person she will eventually call her "self," and as much as it is her duty to be good and kind and win the love others, it is also her duty to collect the fragmented pieces of her identity to be fully recognized. At this point, Esther's self yet to be discovered.

Esther's journey to fill her "self" by becoming "someone" must begin "somewhere," even if that "somewhere" is a place that does not belong to her. Esther's story begins to feel more permanent as she is installed as the Governess of Bleak House. It is important for Esther to be located "somewhere" so that she can begin to piece together her fragmented identity.¹⁰ For Esther, being "somewhere" provides her with the opportunity to gather more love by offering her kindness and housekeeping skills. For Esther, being "somewhere" is better than being "nowhere," for although she does not have a family or her own home, being "somewhere" helps her to feel grounded. This

¹⁰ This discussion of being "somewhere" can be traced to a scene in *Bleak House* where Esther and Caddy Jellyby are deciding what to do on their first morning together. Esther responds to Caddy's question of where she would like to go by saying anywhere, and Caddy fires back "anywhere's nowhere" (46). Esther chooses to take the high road and responds, "Let's go somewhere at any rate."

somewhere does not define her “best self,” but it does define who she is at that moment in time, and by gathering experiences and being part of something, Esther can begin to put together her fragmented identity.

Being Governess of Bleak House gives Esther a sense of purpose, a sense of duty, a sense of being “somewhere,” and a sense of belonging. On her first night at Bleak House, Esther is so grateful to be useful and so infatuated with her charges, Ada and Richard, that all seems right in her life. Yet, her “selfish fancy” takes her back to her godmother’s house and the “shadowy speculations” that followed her regarding the identity of her parents. This fragmented part of her past will always bother Esther, and in her “first story” she sees these confusing shadows often. Esther still lacks self-worth, and as a result, she cannot allow herself even a moment to reflect on her past because she believes, “It was not for me to muse over by-gones, but to act with a cheerful spirit and a grateful heart. So I said to myself, ‘Esther, Esther, Esther! Duty, my dear!’ and gave my little basket of housekeeping keys such a shake, that they sounded like little bells, and rang me hopefully to bed” (76).¹¹ In Esther’s “first story,” no matter how content or useful she feels, she will always be followed by the fragmented story of her past. It will

¹¹ By accepting the housekeeping keys, Esther is also accepting her place in the household, and in a way attaching herself to the physical structure of Bleak House. This attachment of identity to a house is an important one, especially for orphans, according to Wilt. Wilt explains that orphans tend to ensconce their identities in the “household” versus the family (291), for the obvious reason that they lack the family structure. While Esther’s identity does become attached to Bleak House, she allows this attachment to open up the doors of intimate relationships. She looks at Jarndyce as a father figure, but does not look to him to replace the father she never knew. She has taken charge of Richard and Ada and has raised them with love and care that she never had as a child. Esther does not wish to recreate her cold and lonely childhood, so she uses her will to make the lives of her charges and her guardian better; and in return, they offer her all of the love she has always longed for.

also always lead her to question whether she is worthy of all the good that has come to her. Bringing herself back to the present by saying to herself “Esther, Esther, Esther! Duty, my dear!” is a good way to let her past be in the past, but if Esther always focuses on duty, she will never break free to live her life as her “best self.”

It is interesting that Esther is able to take possession easily of her housekeeping keys but that she struggles with taking possession of her self and her own identity. In *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*, Hillary Schor proposes the question, “What kind of property is the self?” (112), and the answer for Esther seems to be “whatever sort of self others want me to be.” Certainly, Esther is a splendid governess, and she fits so well into the workings of Bleak House that she seems to lose part of herself in order to gain belonging and acceptance. While accepting many nicknames from her guardian John Jarndyce and her charges, such as Dame Durden, Old Woman, Little Old Woman, and Mother Hubbard,¹² Esther seems to lose part of her “self” as a way to gain acceptance. Timothy Pealtson argues in “Esther’s Will” that Esther’s “self” at this point is a function of the role she plays in the household (673). To answer Schor’s question, it seems as though Esther’s property of her “self” is something she is willing to sacrifice to fit the role she plays. This role attests to Wilt’s opinion that Esther chooses a role that has “full and flexible shape--which promotes alike the doing and the winning, the loving and being loved, the seeing and the being recognized” (288). Esther’s nicknames seem to be a sort

¹² Graham Daldry makes an interesting observation regarding Esther’s name change and her role as narrator: “While Dickens’s characters sometimes change names--David Copperfield does, of course--Esther is the only figure in his novels to lose one. Even her name belongs to the limited, fictive narrative and becomes another aspect of the shadowy world of the fog, a place for the outside world to write its own stories, and to have its own feelings, to be fictive or narrative...” (77).

of reward from her charges, but it also seems as though Esther is giving up her individuality in order to belong. Esther will struggle more with this notion of individuality when she is ill. But until Esther recognizes that she is an individual with self-worth, she is only playing the role of a fragmented “lost self.”

At this point, Esther has not had possession of her “best self” and she remains focused only on keeping her childhood vow and being dutiful. Esther cares not that her real name has been lost among the rooms of Bleak House because she cares so much for its inhabitants that they can call her what they will. Esther attaches no value to her name as part of her identity and in fact, Esther is so willing to win love and acceptance that if changing her name is required of her, she will gladly sacrifice that part of her identity. Schor believes that at this point, Esther’s notion of “self” “dissolves, decomposes, recomposes, into its many names” (112). Esther’s nicknames seem to be a sort of reward from her charges, but it also seems as though Esther is giving up her individuality in order to belong. Esther will struggle more with this notion of individuality when she is ill.

Not only does she become a “somebody” out of a sense of duty, she puts all her focus on taking care of others and no focus on herself, again creating a sense of a “lost self.” John Jarndyce warns her of the dangers of losing her individualism: “But we must take care, too, that our little woman’s life is not all consumed in care for others” (163). Esther insists that she is happiest when she is taking care of others. Jarndyce continues, “I believe so, too. But some one may find out, what Esther never will,—that the little woman is to be held in remembrance above all other people!” (163). Esther is so untouched by this advice that she goes on to discuss dinner guests and Ada and Richard’s love affair. In

typical Esther Summerson fashion, it is not of her nature to take time to reflect when it comes to her own self-care. The path of Esther's "first story" will not change until she begins to think of herself as an individual with self-worth.

Up until this point in her "first story," Esther has placed her focus on caring for others and has not drawn any attention to her own self. Kevin McLaughlin explains in the essay "Losing One's Place: Displacement and Domesticity in Dickens's *Bleak House*" that there is more to one's identity than nicknames. McLaughlin believes one way to discover or define oneself is to call attention to or have attention called to oneself (885). This is the last thing Esther would want, for attention to be drawn to her or for her to be the person who has to be taken care of, but this is unintentionally what happens when she falls ill. During Esther's illness and her recovery, two important changes happen to her: Esther is forced to retire from her duties and take time for herself, and she is severely scarred following her illness.

Esther's illness and resulting convalescence allows time for introspection before she sees her very altered physical appearance. In "'Who Is This in Pain?': Scarring, Disfigurement, and Female Identity in *Bleak House*," Helena Michie suggests that at no point in the first two-thirds of the novel does Esther have a chance for introspection or self-examination (204), and perhaps this also explains why she only glances at herself in mirrors: she is now busy caring for her charges and managing Bleak House, she has won a place and considers herself a "somebody" as a reward for her duty, and she has little time to think of herself. She has been accepted by all of them, she has earned their love, and she has little need for spending long periods in front of a looking glass, much less

taking time for introspection. She is simply the governess of Bleak House, and for now, that is enough for Esther. But once she becomes ill, her only duty is to focus on making herself well again. Although she is ill for several weeks, Esther explains that “the usual tenor of my life became like an old remembrance” (431). Being stripped of her duties as governess of Bleak House, Esther is forced to take the time to focus on herself. It is not a comfortable predicament in which to be and it provides Esther little resolution with regards to her fragmented self. In a feverish state, Esther has visions of what her life is and where her duties have led her.

While ill and floating in and out of consciousness, Esther notes that the various stages of her life, like the fragmented pieces of herself and her narrative, are jumbled together. Esther says, “While I was very ill, the way in which these divisions of time became confused with one another, distressed my mind exceedingly. At once a child, an elder girl, and the little woman I had been so happy as, I was not only oppressed by cares and difficulties adapted to each station, but by the great perplexity of endlessly trying to reconcile them” (431). Zwerdling notes that Esther’s attempt to reconcile her many roles “oppress her with the sense that every stage of her life, including the supposedly happy present, has merely presented her with a new set of ‘cares and difficulties’” (435). Although Esther has held each of these positions she still feels her “self” is jumbled and lacks definition,

Before I had been confined to [the sick room] many days, everything else seemed to have retired into a remote distance, where there was little or no separation between the various stages of my life which had been really

divided by years. In falling ill, I seemed to have crossed a dark lake, and to have left all my experiences, mingled together by the great distance, on the healthy shore. (431)

Esther is unable to move onto the “second story” of her “best self” until she is able to reconcile and categorize all of her roles in life and determine the woman she wants to be.

For the first time, Esther admits a sense of frustration with her situation. Certainly she lives up to her childhood vow. She is dutiful and kind-hearted in her relationships to not only her charges at Bleak House, but also to Caddy Jellyby, to whom Esther has become a sort of surrogate mother. She has earned the love and trust of many people, and people depend on her. She has a comfortable place to stay and takes trips around London. Yet at this stage in Esther’s life, as she admits to “the frustrations of a life made up solely of duties” (Zwerdling 436), she seems to be admonishing herself for trying to be only a drone who works for love and acceptance. Esther’s illness and recovery is a time where she is forced to be with only herself, and she is forced to reconcile the many “selves” she has been in her short life--the unwanted child, the beloved schoolteacher, the capable governess and mistress of Bleak House, the person to whom everyone turns to for advice and support. Perhaps Jarndyce’s premonition is coming true regarding Esther’s self-worth and his warning that she must think of herself as much as she thinks of others.

A scene where Esther imagines herself as part of a bead on a necklace offers additional insight into her character as being a part of many. For most of her life, Esther wishes only for acceptance, but now that she has so many people who love her and depend on her, she begins to question her role as part of the whole. Esther dreams,

Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which *I* was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest, and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be part of the dreadful thing? (432)

For Esther's entire life, she wanted nothing more than to be part of the whole. But once she has gained her place, perhaps she has lost a sense of individuality. Zwerdling exposes this very notion of individuality: "the image of the starry circle probably expresses her intense though unacknowledged need to break out of the chain of commitments to the community, 'to be taken off from the rest' and be a separate self" (436). Esther must recognize this need to be individual in a dream state because in her real life she focuses only on the lives of others. Just as Scrooge is shown his past and future in order to gain access to his narrative, so too must Esther be "shown" how she has been living in her "first story" as a "lost self."

Esther does not only introspectively explore her life, but she also must come to terms with the physical changes that her illness has caused her. Before this point, little was mentioned about Esther's physical appearance, perhaps for two reasons. Firstly, Esther was hardly concerned with her looks. At one point when Esther's life is bound to take her on a path where she will gather more pieces of her identity, she takes a quick "peep" at her bonnet in the glass to make sure she is presentable (27) but no more time is spent on her appearance. Secondly, perhaps Esther's physical appearance wasn't important to her because she was "ordinary," and being ordinary in appearance was just

another way Esther fit in with everyone else. This follows the story line of Esther's "first story" in which she wishes only to fit in and has little sense of individuality. But following her illness, she cannot deny the changes in her physical appearance that certainly will mark her as an individual.

The revelation of Esther's new appearance is a gradual process. Esther looks first through the veil of her own hair and then slowly pulls her hair aside to reveal her visage. What she sees in her face represents how she feels about herself and her physical identity: "I was very much changed--O very, very much. At first my face was so strange to me, that I think I should have put my hands before it and stared back" (444-45). Esther is physically marked because of her illness, and the scars on her face tell the story of who Esther *is* (Michie 206, my emphasis). Esther finally has "a story," and this story will lead her on the path to her "second story" of her "best self," because from this point on, Esther will not be able to deny the individuality of her physical appearance.

Another reason that Esther's physical identity is discussed with regards to her scarring is because she is about to meet her mother, and her scars act as a distinction between herself and her mother. Schor describes Esther's identity as being "shattered" (114) right before the time when she meets her mother. Schor explains that there is a "death" of Esther's identity in the death of her beauty and her "old face" (114). In *Charles Dickens and the Form of the Novel*, Graham Daldry also discusses a death with regards to Esther's fictive narrative, which he argues "can die and be reborn" following her illness (80). Daldry's statement is reminiscent of the quote from Kermode's work that states that men die because they cannot join the beginning and the end. Esther's change in

appearance was necessary to “kill” off the constructed view she had of herself as being only worthy of love as a reward for her duty if she is to be recognized as a worthy human being, or as an individual “somebody.”

While Esther’s scarring starts her on her way to being an individual she must work at becoming an individual in her heart. While she is recuperating, following a visit from her guardian, Esther returns to her usual always-dutiful self who has little sense of her self-worth. She admonishes herself for fearing that because her looks have changed those who love her will love her less now. She feels she has no right to complain about the way her life has turned out because she has been blessed, despite her illness. Esther returns to the one of the few memories she keeps from her youth, and she writes,

When my guardian left me, I turned my face away upon my couch, and prayed to be forgiven if I, surrounded by such blessings, had magnified to myself the little trial that I had to undergo. The childish prayer of that old birthday, when I had aspired to be industrious, contented, and true-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could, came back into my mind with a reproachful sense of all the happiness I had since enjoyed, and all the affectionate hearts that had been turned towards me. If I were weak now, what had I profited by those mercies? I repeated the old childish prayer in its old childish words, and found that its old peace had not departed from it. (437)

It is clear as stated by Zwerdling that “to rededicate oneself to an ideal formulated in childhood, particularly if it has already become a reality, is to make further progress

impossible” (435). If Esther cannot begin to live life for herself and if she continually returns to her childhood vow, her narrative will always be stuck in her “first story” of duty before all. She will always be part of the whole and her identity will depend upon those around her because she has not taken the steps to discover who she is on her own. Until she can change and amend her vow to make it more livable in the present, especially now that her vow has been realized, she will not be able to discover her “best self” and she will become stuck in her “first story” of duty before individual needs.

But before Esther can work on finding her “second story” as an individual, she must first learn a very important part of her identity from her past: the identity of her parents. Once Esther is reunited with her mother, Lady Dedlock, Esther is immediately forced into another sense of duty: to hide her secret from everyone. She allows herself very little time to think about the information she just learned, but takes strength from the fact that she must remain dutiful and diligent in keeping this new piece of her identity a secret. Once Esther does reflect on her new identity and connection with her mother, her initial response is not one of happiness and joy, but confusion and guilt. Esther remembers,

I hope it may not appear very unnatural or bad in me, that I then became heavily sorrowful to think I had ever been reared. That I felt as if I knew it would have been better and happier for many people, if indeed I had never breathed...that I was so confused and shaken, as to be possessed by a belief that it was right, and had been intended, that I should die in my

birth; and that it was wrong, and not intended, that I should be then alive.

(453)

Esther's narrative remains stuck in her "first story" in which she lacks self-confidence and continues to live in confusion about who she is.

Before Esther comes to an acceptance of her "best self," she faces one more challenge in her life: she faces the decision of marrying for duty or of holding out for the man she truly and romantically loves. Esther does a fair job concealing her romantic feelings for Alan Woodcourt, a doctor to whom she is attracted. Esther notes that she "could have loved him--could have been devoted to him" (445), but she dismisses her feelings that those times are past because her face is scarred from her illness. Esther never considers that while her face may have changed, her compassion and the goodness of her heart remain the same, if not stronger than ever. And in burying this memory of a happy time when she felt that she was worthy of romantic love, Esther is not learning a lesson from her past that she is worthy of love not just because she is dutiful. She continues to remain stuck in her "first story" and devotes her life to duty only.

In giving up Alan Woodcourt forever, Esther dismisses her hopes for romantic love. However, she never forgets her vow to duty, and when John Jarndyce appeals to Esther to become his wife and the mistress of Bleak House, she accepts out of a sense of needing to thank Jarndyce. Giving him her love and her life would not be unpleasant, for Esther truly has grown to care for Jarndyce, but she believes that she must complete her duty and marry Jarndyce because he has been so good to her. She thinks, "To devote my life to his happiness was to thank him poorly, and what had I wished for only the other

night but some new means of thanking him?” (538) In a way, Esther “surrenders” herself to Jarndyce’s narrative, for she still does not believe her narrative is worthy of being told, especially now that she is physically scarred. She knows something regarding her “self” will be lost in marrying Jarndyce, but she cannot name that something:

Still, I cried very much; not only in the fulness of my heart after reading the letter, not only in the strangeness of the prospect--for it was strange though I expected the contents--but as if something for which there was no name or distinct idea were indefinitely lost to me. I was very happy, very thankful, very hopeful; but I cried very much. (538)

It is Esther’s narrative of individuality that is in danger of being lost if she marries Jarndyce.

When Esther finally begins her “second story,” it is not a memory that triggers her narrative, but it is Jarndyce who exposes her need for individuality and her “best self.” After Woodcourt professes his love for her, Esther goes on with her plan to marry Jarndyce. But it is Jarndyce who sees the person Esther really is: a kind and caring individual soul with a romantic side who deserves to have her own story recognized. Jarndyce knows that she will never admit to being unhappy with him, because Esther *would* be happy with him. But he also knows that she would be even happier with Woodcourt because she loves him emotionally and not out of a sense of duty, so he gives her away, like a father giving away a bride. Jarndyce says to Esther, “I had no doubt of your being contented and happy with me, being so dutiful and so devoted; but I saw with whom you would be happier. That I penetrated his secret when Dame Durden was blind

to it, is no wonder; for I knew the good that could never change in her, far better than she did” (752). With her engagement to the man she truly desires, Esther has the chance to be a sexual human being. For the first time in her life, Esther receives something she desires not as a reward for being dutiful, but because Woodcourt is someone who she desires.

Up to this point Esther has gathered many pieces of her fragmented identity: she knows the identity of her parents, she is beginning to accept the changes to her physical appearance, and she is starting her own life as a married woman. One last element of Esther’s identity that was carefully chosen by Dickens was making Esther the narrator of her own story. Esther recognizes herself in the role of narrator, but quickly dismisses her importance noting, “I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, because I am not clever” (17). In deferring to the “other” narrator, Esther seems to believe that her narrative will be the weaker of the two. Wilt defends Esther’s role as narrator as being equal, not subservient, to that of the voice of the male chancery narrator, and she explains how the narratives function “not [as] two opposites but [as] two phases of one being, two deployed strategies for living in the fog” (286). Esther’s narrative of compassion and companionship is just as important as the legalities and technicalities of the Chancery narrative. Both of these narratives balance each other in ways that resemble the gender roles of the time. Esther’s narrative is feminine and she tells stories of domestic duties, illness, child-rearing, and relationship issues. The Chancery narrative is filled with details describing the Jarndyce lawsuit, the weather in London, and Sir Leicester’s family history.

The differences between these two narratives have been widely discussed. In Susan Graver's critical article "Writing in a 'Womanly' Way and the Double Vision of *Bleak House*," Graver talks about the duality not only between the Chancery narrative and Esther's narrative, but of a sense of "double vision" caused by Esther's sense of self-division (3). Graver sums up the distinction between the two narratives very precisely: "the third-person narration is wide-ranging, public, probing, and dark; the first-person, domestic, protective, personal, and affirmative" (3). Graver goes on to argue that subterfuge is a strategy used by the powerless as a way to manage actions, thoughts and feelings deemed "unwomanly" (3). A Victorian woman writing the story of her own life for public reading would certainly be deemed unworthy, and perhaps that explains why Esther chose to write her story taking more of a diary form: it is personal and it is a private narrative. Graver describes Esther's two voices as being "a dominate one that is cheerfully accepting and selfishly accommodating; and a muted one, itself double-edged, that is inquiring, critical, and discontented but also hesitant, self-disparaging, and defensive" (4).

I would argue that these voices are the exact narrative of Esther's "first story" and "second story." Esther's "first story" is only concerned with others while her "second story" is much more personal and painful to live. Whereas Scrooge and David were living better, more comfortable lives as their "best selves" in their "second stories" (Scrooge was laughing like a child and David found a true partner and counselor in love and life), Esther's "second story," although truthful and more the story of her "best self" because it focuses on her own self, is still painful and demanding. As much as Dickens is

trying to empower Esther by giving her a platform for her own narrative, he still cannot give her a completely public voice because women of this time did not have a public voice. Graves notes that a conspiracy exists in the novel to make Esther happy, but that the ultimate conspiracy is to “silence her” (8). Perhaps Dickens felt the same way: he gave Esther a place for her writing, but it must remain private. Esther closes her narrative with these words, “The few words that I have to add to what I have written are soon penned; then I, and the unknown friend to who I write, will part forever” (767). If Esther parts with her “unknown friend” will she continue to write? Dickens certainly does not answer these questions as he ends the entire novel with the words “--even supposing--” leaving room for many interpretations.

Wilt believes that Esther’s leaving her narrative open is appropriate because, “at the end of *Bleak House*, Esther settles down to living, [declining] to close her narrative (same thing)” (288). This lack of closing of the narrative also agrees with Miller’s theory of the “incomplete circle or spiral taken by temporality in fiction” (33). Perhaps Esther chose to leave her narrative open because the story of her “best self” is just beginning. Esther settles down to living the life of her “best self”--a life *for herself* for the first time in the novel. Perhaps she has closed out her “second story” and the “--even supposing--” is the beginning of a new story, a “third story.” A “third story” where perhaps Esther writes about her new role as wife and mother who is accepting of this current “self” as one who will lead her into old age and the future? Perhaps Kern is alluding to the idea of a possible “third story” in his opinion of the ending of the novel: “the narrative’s ending at least leaves open the possibility that she may have finally learned, through telling her

story, to value herself as the story suggests she should” (126). Perhaps Esther’s “third story” would be one of her value as an individual, something her “first story” definitely lacks.

And whether or not, as Kearns suggested, Esther began her narrative at the suggestion of someone else, writing to her “unknown friend” has become such an important part of her life she has made special room for it. Reminiscent of Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own,” Esther has found a place for her writing in her home and her life. Esther describes, “even now, looking up from my desk as I write, early in the morning at my summer window” (786) as if she has finally found a place for her self to be an individual focused on her “best self.”

Esther’s narration is similar to that of David Copperfield because both were told by a homodiegetic narrator. Just as David’s goal is to attempt to weave a net in which to gather his memories, Esther’s narrative is a “detailed life-pattern” (Zwerdling 430) wherein she attempts to gather the fragmented pieces of her identity. Both David and Esther act as a voice for the other characters of their respective novels as described by Merritt Moseley in “The Ontology of Esther’s Narrative in *Bleak House*.” “Like David, Esther is kept on the move, acquiring the kind of detailed knowledge of other people’s thoughts and fates which it is a large part of her function to report to us” (36). Esther not only reports to the reader what others are doing, but she also includes her feelings and opinions. Esther’s need to record her opinions “not because I believe that this or any other thing was so, because I thought so; but only because I did think so, and I want to be quite candid about all I thought and did” (204) adds her personality and voice to the

story. Schor notes the personal nature of Esther's narrative: her "stylistic quirks, as a narrator" encourage a different reading of her narrative versus that of the omniscient narrator (103). Esther's narrative is the domestic partner to the public chancery narrative, and her narrative provides the reader a sort of "break" from the drudgery of the legal world.¹³ The narrative Esther shares with the reader also takes the focus off of her own story and presents the details of the lives of the people who were important to her.

And the way that Esther arrives at her "second story" is much different from the way David does. David is writing of the entirety of his past life and of all the lessons he learned from his memories in a retrospective way. He has grown from the lessons of his memories, he has changed his life, and he is living in his "second story." Esther's "second story" is less obvious because she has not necessarily adopted all of the lessons she learned from her past. She is still working on being an individual. She still shows doubt that her scarred face is a face her husband could love. While David has grown, Esther's change is different. In "The Double Narrative of *Bleak House*," W.J. Harvey explains the differences between the two narratives:

In some cases--*David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*--the adult narrator judges implicitly or explicitly, his growth towards maturity. Esther is clearly not in this category; she swiftly advances from child to woman and scarcely changes at all. We feel that she was "born old"--a feeling reflected in the nicknames given to her...Clearly, we are meant to take Esther on trust. If what she tells us is wrong or limited this signifies no

¹³ In *Character and the Novel*, WJ Harvey adds that Esther's character may also be a "break" "controlling the runaway tendency of Dickens's imagination" (91).

moral blindspot in her, no flaw in her sensibility but only her necessary innocence of the full ramifications of the plot. (93)

Whereas David had many years to reflect on his past, gather his memories, and describe how he matured into his “best self,” Esther’s “swift” change allows little time for retrospection.

Esther’s role as narrator also gives a female perspective during an era when the female was meant to be cloistered in the home. Wilt notes that Esther’s narrative is of her own choosing (289), and by allowing her to have her own voice, Dickens places Esther’s character in a very empowering role. Wilt supports this idea of the empowering of Esther when she writes about the importance of Esther’s narrative and she says,

Since [Esther’s] purpose is the full telling of a story larger than herself and her own past to an audience wider than herself and her own present or future, her feats of memory, her insights into other minds, her happy presence at the crucial scenes of so many other lives are more credible than David’s or Pip’s...The story that is larger than her own is more real to her... (302-3)

Esther’s narrative is important because it incorporates the female narrative as being just as important as, and able to be read next to, the male narrative.

Esther’s narrative ends with less closure than David’s. The reader knows David is mature, changed, and content at the end of his narrative. Dickens does not conclude Esther’s narrative in such a tidy way as Esther’s narrative is still fragmented at the end of the novel. While she may have left the reader with little closure, her narrative is indeed

larger than herself, because it is the narrative of many people. Esther has just begun to focus on herself as an individual leading to the possibility of a “third story.”

Conclusion

Charles Dickens had one memory that haunted him his entire life: the memory of being sent to work in the blackening house as a young child. Dickens wrote to his friend John Forster about the power this memory held over him and said, “I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life” (23). No matter how far away from his dream his life took him, he could always count on the memory of this painful time to resurface. But Dickens also held happy memories close as well, such as his boyhood fancy of Christmas trees (Forster 7). Rosemarie Bodenheimer believes that it was Dickens’s fondness for both the good and the sad memories that made his writing, especially *David Copperfield*, strike “the most perfect tonal and structural balance between [Dickens’s] nostalgic love of memory and his fear of uncontrollably intrusive memories” (*Knowing Dickens* 76-77).¹⁴ Dickens concern with memories along with his care for his characters created within him a creative conundrum between reality and fiction. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst describes Dickens as a “sad, strange figure who was always on the move, but never seems to have been sure whether he was searching for something or running away from it” (*Becoming Dickens* 15). Perhaps Dickens was searching for his next character, or his next story, or

¹⁴ Given the discussion on Dickens and whether or not his characters were autobiographical, another idea can be introduced as well. Dickens struggled with his own painful memories, for example, of working in a blackening house and growing up poor. Perhaps Dickens’s own discourse was to take his painful memories—the “uncontrollably intrusive memories” as Bodenheimer described them, and “give them” to his characters. Perhaps he recognized his own suffering and that he was living poorly with the lessons his memories taught him, and as a way to relieve his suffering, Dickens placed his painful memories with his characters.

perhaps he was running from his painful childhood memories. We cannot be sure which, but when reading Dickens's literature, we can be sure that he made his characters aware of the power that memories held.

Three of Dickens's characters must learn to live with the lessons their memories teach them so that they can live their lives as their "best selves." When Ebenezer Scrooge from "A Christmas Carol," David Copperfield from *David Copperfield*, and Esther Summerson from *Bleak House* are not living well with their memories, they are living a "lost" life. Once the characters learn to live well with their memories, they are able to recapture what Audrey Jaffee calls their "best self" (255). Living as their "best self" also allows the three characters to gain the language they need in order to narrate their "second stories" of growth and change.

Ebenezer Scrooge was so hurt by his painful memories that he represses them completely. Scrooge's denial of his past severs all relationships with society and he focuses only on money as something he can control. When Scrooge is forced to face his memories he realizes that with the sad times come happy times as well. When he sees his lonely death, he fears he will die without people around him and he changes his ways. Scrooge is an example of one of Dickens's characters who becomes his "best self" by regaining his memories, both good and bad, and reconnecting with human kind in order to live each day with laughter and people. Scrooge gains the ability to narrate his "second story" using a discourse that is compassionate and full of laughter.

David Copperfield believes that a man who lives well with his memories is a good man indeed, but it is not until David's soul becomes lost and scrambled that he can fully

understand what it means to live well with memories. As an orphaned youth, David is caught between his desire to recreate his carefree childhood or to face his adulthood. David meets Emily and Dora, women who remind him of his mother, and Agnes, a woman who is mature and comforting and like a sister to him. David's immature heart leads him to marry Dora in hopes of recreating his carefree childhood. David soon learns that one cannot live only in the past, and he finds himself empty and lost after Dora's death. When David learns to leave his past in the past, and to live his life in the present with the lessons he learned from his memories, he is his "best self." David's second story is one where he lives in the present with his partner Agnes.

Esther Summerson has few childhood memories, but those she has she carries with her closely. Esther does not rely solely on her long-ago past to create her identity, but on the more recent past to gather the pieces of her self. Esther collects experiences from her school years and from when she is governess of Bleak House along with learning the identity of her mother and records them in a diary-like way, which empowers her to be the narrator of her own story of the journey to her "best self." Esther attempts to live her life according to a childhood vow she creates after being told by her godmother that she should never have been born, and while this vow helps Esther to be a good person and encourages her to work hard, she loses her sense of individuality and bases her self-worth is only defined by her duty to others. Esther finally takes control of her life and marries for love, and her narrative ends as she settles down to living her best life, a life of her "second story" where she has the ability to tell the stories of her individual choices that are based on her wants rather than her duties.

While living well with memories is important to Dickens's characters, the movement of the narrative is equally important. When Scrooge represses his memories, he lacks the language to tell his own story. A narrator tells the story of Scrooge's journey with the ghosts through his past and into his future. Once Scrooge remembers his past and reconnects with society, he is able to gain the language necessary to narrate his own story. David, a writer by trade, narrates his story in a fictionalized way; his well-organized, chronological memories weave a sort of tapestry or rug, and the events of his journey to his best self are rolled out neatly for the reader to follow. David's narrative is able to focus on his present life and he is able to envision his future once he is living well with his memories. Esther's narrative, while more diary-like, creates an intimate female voice that connects the reader to her story. Esther's childhood vow appears again and again in her narrative, but once she values her independence she understands that she can earn love because of her self-worth and not just as a reward for being dutiful, her narrative is left open as she settles into her life as her "best self."

In the short story "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain," Charles Dickens tells the tale of a chemist who is so hurt by his past that he makes a bargain with a ghost to have all of his painful memories erased. The chemist does not immediately understand that his bargain comes at a cost, for when he comes into contact with others, he erases their memories too. He immediately sees the change in others, and sees those who were caring and compassionate humans turn into cruel and uncaring beings. The chemist also sees the changes in himself, and he cries, "I have lost my memory of sorrow, wrong, and trouble, and with that I have lost all, man would remember!" (*A Christmas Carol* 221).

The chemist is distraught and even more upset with this recognition than he was when he was living with his painful memories. It takes the wisdom of a kind, compassionate woman to explain the value of painful memories, “May I tell you why it seems to me a good thing for us, to remember wrong that has been done to us? That we may forgive it” (223).

Dickens recognized that while memories can be painful, they connect human beings together through compassion and the ability to forgive. Memories provide humans with a language to tell the story of their “best self,” and that self must include both happy and bad memories. Soren Kierkegaard once said, “It is quite true what philosophy says; that life must be understood backwards. But then one forges the other principle: that it must be lived forwards” (*Papers and Journals* IV A 164 1843). This is a valuable lesson learned by the three Dickens characters discussed in this paper: Scrooge had to regain admittance into society through remembering his painful past, which allowed him the compassion to connect with others. David had to recognize that he could not relive the past and live his best life in the present. Once he was able to leave his past in the past, the lessons he learned from his memories allowed him to be his “best self” in the present. And Esther’s more recent memories allowed her to gather pieces of her identity that led her to her “best self” as an individual somebody--a mother, wife, caregiver of someplace--her own Bleak House.

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