The Pattern of Vulnerability and Development in Dickens's *Dombey and Son*

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This paper will identify a pattern in Dickens's novel *Dombey and Son*. The novel tells the story of the financier Paul Dombey and his relations with his two children: his son, Paul, and his daughter, Florence. (To avoid confusion, I refer to the father as "Dombey" and to the son as "Paul.") I intend to focus on Dombey's relationship with Florence, which is clearly the enduring story, since Paul dies less than halfway through the novel. Above all, *Dombey and Son* chronicles Florence's ways of coping with her role as a rejected child. From the day Paul is born, Dombey dotes on him as the future "Son" in his firm *Dombey and Son*, while showing something less than indifference for his daughter. Florence yearns for her father's love and approval but never enjoys it during Dombey's years of financial power. Yet, despite the indignities that she suffers, Florence develops and thrives. This paper intends to show how each step in Florence's development is marked by an event exposing her to some kind of vulnerability. The paper will be divided into four parts, corresponding to these four events, with the intention of showing a pattern by which each new exposure enhances Florence's life.

Part I: The Death of Florence's Mother. The first crisis that Florence faces is the death of her mother, which opens the novel. Mrs. Dombey has just given birth to a son, already named Paul,

after his father. Dombey goes to his wife's bedside after the birth, but is unconscious of her danger. He gloats triumphantly over the baby boy. Mrs. Dombey is too weak to respond. Almost via peripheral vision, Dombey notices his little daughter Florence, hugging her mother and crying. It later transpires that in this scene Dombey has an uncomfortable feeling about Florence's demonstration of awareness and sorrow. Though Dombey doesn't analyze the feeling, not being an introspective type, he resents a more becoming response than his own. Florence sees that her mother is dying, while Dombey is too intoxicated by the future of his son and firm to notice. We are later told explicitly that Dombey remembers this and holds it against Florence:

> The last time he had seen his slighted child, there had been that in the sad embrace between her and her dying mother, which was at once a revelation and a reproach to him. (42)

Part of Dombey's bad conscience on this point is prompted by the fact that on the occasion of his wife's death, he was unable to answer the new doctor's inquiry about the state of his wife's health. He was too giddy in the contemplation of the baby and his place in the firm of Dombey and Son.

Dombey is used to deference. His favorite employee in the office is Carker the manager (thus called to distinguish him from his older brother, the disgraced and oddly-dubbed "Carker the junior," [e.g., 95]). Being both a scoundrel and an extremely clever man, Carker is a master of flattery. He knows exactly how to stroke Dombey's pride and still come off as a plain-spoken fellow[1]. At home, Dombey deals with everyone through his fawning sister, Mrs. Chick. Hence, with sycophants to manage his affairs both in the office and at home,

Dombey has no one to acquaint him with glaring flaws in his own character.

On the occasion of this birth and death (of her brother and mother, respectively), we learn two things about Florence. First, we learn that her father ignores her. In this scene, Dombey refuses to hear a full sentence about her. When the nurse reminisces about Florence's birth, Dombey interrupts her:

> "I remember when Miss Florence was born—"
>
> "Ay, ay, ay," said Mr. Dombey, bending over the basket bedstead, and slightly bending his brows at the same time. "Miss Florence was all very well, but this is another matter. This young gentleman has to accomplish a destiny. A destiny, little fellow!" (14)

Then Dombey kisses the baby and walks awkwardly away, "seeming to fear that the action involved some compromise of his dignity" (Ibid.). We also learn that Florence is suffering a major loss with the death of her mother, since it becomes clear that Mrs. Chick is even less capable of loving her than Dombey seems to be[2]. Therefore, this is a major tragedy for Florence.

Nevertheless, Florence's life is advanced in two ways: First, Paul is born, and Paul will love Florence as much as his mother did. And secondly, Polly Toodle is hired to watch over Paul, and Polly is Florence's first friend. Polly also, as will be seen, commits the breach of her orders that leads to Florence's second fortunate exposure to danger. Neither of these benefits is arguable, though we are only made aware of them after the story has had time to proceed.

Part II: Lost and Kidnapped. The second crisis occurs six months after the hiring of Polly Tootle to be Paul's nurse. We know it is

about six months because Dombey announces this in a very pompous and insulting speech to Polly[3].

As the previous note says (see Endnote 3), Polly's son Rob is now in "The Charitable Grinder's" ragged school. Perhaps prompted by maternal instinct, Polly is anxious to see how he is faring, but she is too afraid of Dombey's stern prohibition of her visiting her family (and their lowering influence) while she is Paul's nurse. It is the feistily benign Susan Nipper, Florence's young caretaker, who convinces Polly that they can just take the children out for a walk in the general direction of the Toodle house, and no one will be the wiser.

Unfortunately for Polly's tenure in the Dombey house, as she and the entourage approach her home, they come upon a scene in which Rob is being set upon by street boys. Polly doesn't realize that this is something like a daily event, due to Rob's school uniform, which is ill-fitting, loud, and ridiculous in design. Polly rushes to Rob's defense, and in the confusion Florence is left alone and quickly realizes she is lost. Being simple and trusting, she is lured by an old fortune-teller who calls herself "Good Mrs. Brown" to her lair, a threadbare hovel that will play its part in the ensuing story[4]. It transpires that there is a limit to Good Mrs. Brown's wickedness. She means Florence no great harm, and only takes her fine clothes, including the shoes[5]. She then dresses Florence in rags and paper slippers, leads her away from the lair, and lets her go, warning her, as a precaution against Florence's home being too nearby, not to go home but to go to her father's office in the city, which is fairly far away.

This is a frightening experience for Florence, which could

obviously have ended in disaster. Furthermore, Paul and Florence lose their friend Polly, who is fired when Dombey learns of this outing[6]. The title of this chapter is "Paul's Second Deprivation." Both of Florence's traumatic situations have marked major losses for Paul. In Florence's case, though, this is another advance in her life because it is through this event that she meets Walter Gay, who becomes the love of her life.

Walter finds Florence through a working man, who knows Walter works for Dombey and calls him over when Florence asks where the offices of Dombey and Son are. Then Walter hears Florence's story, which he believes implicitly in spite of her ragged clothes. Her long, flowing hair is all the proof he needs that this is Florence Dombey. In effect, Walter has already fallen in love with Florence, though she is still a little girl. This is a brother-sister relationship, but Walter does (somewhat notoriously) put one of Mrs. Brown's paper slippers back on Florence's foot, *Cinderella*-style[7].

Consequently, the suggestion of romance is already planted—and rightly so, since the real message in this episode is that out of Florence's terror has come something good. The crowning demonstration that a good thing has happened is Florence's stay at the Wooden Midshipman, with kindly old Uncle Saul. The Midshipman, as Harry Stone says very well, is "a place of healing refuge, a succoring fairy-tale sanctuary, where the simple, the good, and the uncorrupted can congregate and take strength from one another" (150). In Florence's case, it is probably the first house she has ever entered in which everyone dotes on her.

Part III: Walter at his most vulnerable. Walter Gay, who turns out to be Florence's one and only choice for a husband, is a normal man,

rather than an eccentric. As Beth F. Herst suggests, Walter is in the tradition of Nicholas Nichelby, Dick Swiveller and Martin Chuzzlewit: "all represent attempts to combine the familiar figure and function—the young man of spirit in pursuit of love, fortune and a happy ending—with a realism of presentation that allows for weakness and imperfection, not quite 'indecencies' perhaps...but natural failings at least" (5). A scene that seems doomed to turn out badly for Walter, and for Florence's chances of becoming connected with him at all, occurs when Uncle Sol's shop faces ruin[8].

There are two reasons for counting this as another vulnerable situation for Florence: first, because it upsets her deeply, due to her empathy for Walter; and, second, because (as in retrospect we can see) Walter trembles on the brink of losing the opportunities to meet Florence that lead to their marriage and Florence's future happiness.

Up to this point, the financial problems of Solomon Gills (Uncle Sol) have been a consequence of outmoded and unpopular merchandise at the Wooden Midshipman. He makes nautical instruments that, though possibly interesting to passers-by, are of no more use to them than a slide rule would be to an engineer in an age of calculators. Now Sol is in real financial trouble because he offered his shop as collateral for a loan to a friend, and the friend has defaulted. He has absolutely no way of paying back the loan except to borrow the money from someone. But from whom? Sol can't think of a single potential lender.

Fortunately, as it turns out, the ever-sanguine Captain Cuttle, after much pondering and many evasions, comes up with the idea of asking Paul's employer, the great Dombey himself, for the money. The Captain might be literature's foremost diamond-in-the-rough.

There is no one more warmhearted and benevolent, but he looks like a model for Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean. His face reminds us of Chesterton's apt dictum that ugly characters are the lifeblood of Dickens's novels. It is one large, unbalanced blemish. He always wears seaman's clothes and sports a sort of pirate's hook in place of his missing left hand. Furthermore, as becomes a man of clear conscience, he is not embarrassed at all by his appearance. He habitually salutes ladies with his hook.

Nevertheless, the Captain is out of his element in most land-locked situations, and is often charmingly oblivious to what is going on around him. In this case, based on his absolute misreading of the great magnate's inclinations, the Captain thinks Dombey, as an old friend of the family (which he clearly isn't), would be happy to lend Sol the money to save his business. He therefore insists on Walter's approaching Dombey with this request, and he further volunteers to facilitate this approach by accompanying Walter to Brighton, where Dombey is vacationing.

To Walter, this might as well be a rite of passage. He would rather be tortured than beg money from Dombey, who has made it clear that he dislikes Walter, as a brief review shows. Even on their very first meeting, Dombey treated a polite correction by Walter as an offense. "Oh! you are the son of Mr. Gills the Ships' Instrument Marker," Dombey observed, cordially enough. "Nephew Sir," Walter inserted. "I said nephew, boy," Dombey snapped (51). This was almost pathological. Dombey was willing to lie, clearly and consciously, rather than be corrected on a trivial point by an inferior. Sometime later, Dombey didn't allow Walter to make a modest speech refusing a reward for returning Florence, when she was lost:

> "You are a boy," said Dombey, suddenly and almost fiercely; "and what you think of, or affect to think of, is of little consequence. You have done well, Sir. Don't undo it. Louisa, please to give the lad some wine." (98)

The poison in this dismissal was double-dipped: Not only was what Walter thought of no value; it was probably just an affectation. If Arthur wasn't allowed to answer (since his answer would be of no consequence), he shouldn't have been accused of insincerity.

Dombey's growing dislike for Walter is a minor pattern in the novel, right up to the point where he sends Walter off to Barbados, a malicious order that he himself regrets and tries to rescind, but too late.

Having Captain Cuttle along—with the Captain bearing his humble accessories (featuring two silver spoons) as intended gifts for Dombey—is almost unbearable. But Walter never falters. He makes the request, and it is granted, thanks to the providential fact of little Paul's being present in the room at the time. Dombey considers this a chance to demonstrate to his son what money can do and the kind of power over life and death that he will inherit. So he lets Paul decide whether or not to give Walter the money his uncle needs.

Being a precocious judge of character, Paul quickly advises in Walter's favor. This is a great relief for Uncle Sol because Dombey honors Paul's judgment, and in this sense, he is an honorable man: there is no question of his not providing the money. Even so, true to character, Dombey takes the occasion to humble Walter with harsh and unearned disparagements, and Walter leaves the Dombey home feeling secretly depressed.

All the time this scene is unfolding, Florence watches and sheds

tears. This is very much like the scene in which her mother died. Only Florence responds to the human situation. Her visible empathy for Walter puts their relationship on a solid footing. His daydreams of a better friendship with her are seen to have substance. She remembers him and feels his humiliation. From this point on, until Walter's transmogrifying voyage to Barbados, Florence and Walter have at least a brother-sister love for each other. Their shared sadness and discomfort in the face of Sol's situation and Dombey's arrogantly granted favor mark the beginning of their conscious love[9].

Part IV: Dombey's final rejection of Florence. The fourth and most obvious example of this pattern of vulnerability and rejection occurs after Dombey has married Edith. Unfortunately for Dombey, Edith is a sort of time bomb waiting to explode. She was groomed by her mother to ensnare a rich husband, and her previous marriage was a fiasco, in which she married a rich man she didn't care about, who then died before the contractual time-period necessary for Edith to inherit his money had elapsed. So Edith got nothing for the indignity of selling herself. (She also lost a child. The loss further attracts Dombey because Paul has died by the time they meet, and Dombey feels as if, like Edith, he has no children at all.) Edith makes it clear to her mother that the future will be different, and she will not go gently into another cold-blooded marriage for money. Skillfully manipulated by Major Joe Bagstock — a friend of Edith's scheming mother, and a much worse scoundrel than the mother—Dombey finds Edith perfect for his purposes. She is beautiful, stunning in dress, talented in art and music, and haughty. The last quality might be a warning to a more experienced man, but Dombey has never stooped to observing human behavior very closely. As Dickens puts it

somewhat later in the novel, "Mr. Dombey, being a good deal in the statue way himself, was well enough pleased to see his handsome wife immoveable and proud and cold" (545). He is an egotist, and he thinks that haughtiness is perfectly natural to a woman worthy of becoming the second Mrs. Dombey[10].

That Dombey could himself become the object of scorn or indifference is the lesson of his marriage from the first day, though he doesn't recognize the truth until the party he orders to celebrate the union. Edith is disdainful of everyone at the party that Dombey is trying to impress. She must make a mental exception of her cousin Feenix and his friends, who represent her own contribution to the party; but Feenix and his cohorts are titled aristocracy, as opposed to wealthy business magnates, and they also manage to convey a certain contempt for Dombey's much richer associates, and are thus no consolation at all to Dombey[11].

Over time, Dombey's anger increases. As far as he is concerned, his disagreement with Edith is simply a grave flaw in his wife, to be mended by the application of increasing pressure. It is inconceivable to Dombey that she might leave him.

One source of his displeasure is the discovery that Edith treats Florence with genuine maternal love. Edith has tried to conceal the fact of this warm relationship from Dombey because, for one thing, it is a side of her nature that she doesn't wish to show him. Dombey first notices their rapport at a very unfortunate moment for everyone. He has been sleeping in a chair across from Florence, who is flurried and gratified at the unusual event of being alone in the same room with her father. He has a handkerchief over his face and seems to be sleeping. In fact, he is watching Florence, and for the first time

ever joins her in his mind with her dead brother:

> As he looked, she became blended with the child he had loved, and he could hardy separate the two. As he looked, he saw her for an instant by a clearer and brighter light, not bending over that child's pillow as his rival — monstrous thought—but as the spirit of his home, and in the action attending himself no less. (548)

Dombey almost says, "Florence, come here!" (Ibid.). He is checked by the entrance of Edith. To his amazement, Edith is a completely different person. She is sweet and loving with Florence. This turns his past aversion to Florence into conscious hatred: "...but a darkness gathered on his face, exceeding any that the night could cast, and rested there" (549). Dombey now sees Florence as the person who wept at his first wife's deathbed, while he stood back (as if this were Florence's fault); who was adored by Paul[12], while his own bond with his son, for all its genuine love, was several degrees cooler; and who has now usurped the love that his wife owes *him*.

Aside from this revelation, Dombey realizes that Edith despises his chief assistant, Carker. Dombey issues an edict that puts both bits of knowledge to use. He decrees that henceforth, Edith will refrain from unbecoming displays of affection for Florence, since they put Edith's demeanor towards himself in an unpleasant light, and he also directs that all communications between Edith and himself will henceforth come through Carker. This is too much for Edith, who has been assailed by Carker's insinuations since her engagement to Dombey. After a decent period of psychological abuse, she apparently leaves Dombey with Carker. The key word here is "apparently," though Carker certainly thinks Edith is ready to disgrace her

husband and join him in an adulterous affair.

Galvanized into furious action, Dombey learns from Rob the Grinder, now Carker's spy, that his wife and Carker are in the city of Dijon[13]. Dombey hurries off to the rendezvous point in France, only to discover that Edith has left Dijon. As she later explains to Florence—the only person whose opinion she cares about—she never consummated her affair with Carker: in Victorian language, she never "betrayed" Dombey. She gives Florence her permission to ease Dombey's mind on this point. Edith's revenge on both men was to agree to meet Carker in Dijon—thus appearing to "the World" (which is personified in this section) to be committing adultery, and thus arousing Dombey's fury—while brushing off Carker with finality in Dijon. In fact, Edith's revenge on Carker was such a blow to his ego that he lost his poise in his flight from Dombey and his agents. Though Edith hardly planned this, she contributed to the accident that killed Carker[14].

At the time of Edith's departure for Dijon, this situation presents itself to Florence as a pitiful dilemma. She still loves Edith, despite drawing the same inferences from what she has seen as everyone else, but her love for her father hasn't abated either. She pities him and throws off her usual shyness in his presence to try to embrace him. Dombey, in a rage, strikes Florence hard in the breast (symbolic center of her sweet nature), actually leaving a mark. He snarls at her, telling her to go with Edith, since they were always "in league" (721). This is a misreading of Edith's love for Florence, and it is a crass distortion of Florence's love for both of them. Florence then leaves the house in sorrow and despair. She literally finds herself on the streets, with no idea at first where she can go

for shelter.

By this time, the reader knows that Florence's new vulnerability —her apparent loss of family connections—is for the good because it forces the recognition that she can no longer court her father's love. The sudden appearance of her devoted mongrel Diogenes reminds her that she is not entirely alone. Diogenes' joyful capering at finding his mistress is especially reassuring because of the change of tone it effects. Then Florence realizes that she still has the refuge that she resorted to in her childhood, after her ordeal with "Good Mrs. Brown": she can go to Uncle Sol's home, the Wooden Midshipman. Even though Walter's ship (aptly named *The Son and Heir*) has been wrecked, and he is presumed dead, she knows that Uncle Sol will take her in. So, willy-nilly, she finds the Midshipman. At this time, Uncle Sol is gone too, apparently still on a voyage to find Walter. Fortunately, Captain Cuttle, the kindest and most disinterested of protectors, is watching over the shop, and he takes every measure to assure the safety and comfort of his "lady-lass."[15]

Skipping an irrelevant summary of subsequent events, it is soon revealed to all that not only has Uncle Sol returned from his travels but Walter himself has returned safe, after all. Like Esther Summerson's future husband in *Bleak House*, Walter has survived the shipwreck and distinguished himself. He has also secured a position for himself as an officer on another ship through his heroic actions and presence of mind. This quickly leads to the marriage of Walter and Florence and their joint voyage on Walter's new ship.

It might be argued that one more peril awaits Florence—even a double one—as pregnant wife accompanying her husband on the treacherous seas. But this is all part and parcel of Florence's

marriage with Walter. Upon the couple's safe return, through a change of heart that Dickens effects with mastery,[16] Dombey recognizes Florence for what she is: his child and the equal of her late brother, Paul. Thus, Florence's final exposure to danger is the means through which she marries Walter and is able to live a full life.

Notes

1 Hasketh Pearson disapproves of the portrait of Carker the Manager. "His [Dickens's] successes are as glorious as his failures are monstrous; and perhaps it takes a man capable of imagining a [Captain] Cuttle to conceive a Carker, who is not a human being at all but an object on which Dickens can vent his feelings of hatred and repugnance" (153). Granted that Carker is "not a man at all"—he is a character from fiction—this comment strikes me as amateur psychology. Carker is evil, just as Captain Cuttle is good, but such is the variety of real life. Carker strikes me as a rather successfully drawn sociopath. It is true that the cat metaphor that Dickens uses to draw Carker is slightly artificial. On the other hand, his confidence, his irrationally rude treatment of his brother, his competence in many areas, and the self-destructive impulse we see both in his courtship of Edith and his financial overreaching (so prophetic of similar excesses in the twenty-first century) all mark him as a classic sociopath. If Pearson has any reason to attribute this to some private issue in Dickens's psyche, he doesn't share it with us.

2 This distinction between Dombey and his sister is absolute. As cold and pompous as he certainly is, it eventually transpires that Dombey has integrity. The most obvious demonstration of this is Dombey's insistence on paying all his debts as his firm begins to

fail and creditors demand their money. He is not intrinsically heartless or selfish, and is therefore capable of change. In fact, his first conscious love for Florence comes after his financial ruin is complete, but before her famous reconciliation with him. He is thinking of her before she presents herself. Mrs. Chick, by contrast, is a coldhearted sycophant, who cares about no one but herself. She disparages Dombey's wife in this scene, both before and after her death; she encourages Dombey's neglect of Florence; and she coldly rejects her protegee, the well-meaning toad Miss Tox, as soon as Miss Tox no longer serves a useful purpose.

3 Dombey's frank references to Polly's family being "steeped in ignorance" and "the inferior classes" in this speech (75) show him at his worst. He is hard on Polly because of his jealousy of anyone with a more intimate approach to Paul than his own, but the speech is truly outrageous. As an additional irony, the point of Dombey's speech is that he intends to put Polly's oldest son Rob in a charity school called "The Charitable Grinders." Dickens distrusted such "ragged schools," as Victorians called them. Rob turns out badly because of this experience, as does Lizzy Hexam's younger brother Charlie of *Our Mutual Friend*, in which Charlie's ragged school is presented more closely than Rob's. Among other things, both boys become selfish and crafty. This reinforces the point that Dombey is really doing Polly no favor by making Rob a Charitable Grinder. In truth, the favor does more harm than Dombey's insults.

4 This is the same hovel where much later in the novel Dombey prevails on Mrs. Brown to trick Rob the Grinder into giving up the rendezvous location of Rob's employer, Carker the manager, and

the second Mrs. Dombey.

5 Actually, Mrs. Brown also wants Florence's hair. There is a little melodrama in the old lady's witchlike snips of the scissors in the direction of Florence's locks. In the end, though, Mrs. Brown restrains herself. She is far from a potential child-molester. Her main motive throughout the novel is greed and nothing more.

6 Susan Nipper, who originated the idea of the excursion, is excused on account of her age, and also, perhaps, because Dombey has no personal interest in Florence or her caretaker.

7 Jerome Meckier, noting this obvious reference to the Cinderella story, observes that "No fewer than six of Dickens's first seven novels are indebted to *Cinderella*" (14).

8 A very typical question in Dickens criticism arises in the case of Walter, and perhaps in the case of every basically serious character: Is he likable at all? G. K. Chesterton, who is very strong on colorful opinion, thinks not. Speaking of Florence's other suitor, Toots, one of Dickens's most lovable and admirably drawn fools, Chesterton avers, "He is as good a lover as Walter Gay is a bad one. Florence surely deserved her father's scorn if she could prefer Gay to Toots" (187). Chesterton apologizes for his "somewhat violent expression" (Ibid.), but this makes all the clearer that he is serious. I am indebted to Edwin Eigner (111) for pointing out the Chesterton observation before I took note of it myself.

However, Eigner seems to approve of this observation, while I consider it ridiculous (and completely representative of Chesterton's entire comment; there is no question of a statement suffering from lack of context). As so often with Chesterton—a very entertaining Dickens critic—the comment betrays the usual confusion of fictional

characters as entertainment and the same characters as representatives of actual human experience. Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* is another great comic character, but who would really want her as a mother? Returning to Toots: in real life, and in any age, only someone in special circumstances, like the former servant girl Susan Nipper, would want him for a husband. And even when we sympathize with Susan's circumstances, I suspect that many readers join me in feeling slightly uncomfortable with her marriage to Toots. She is sacrificing anything close to equality of understanding for Toots's heart of gold and his inheritance. If Toots lacked the real gold, would his good heart be enough for Susan?

Yet Chesterton pretends to feel that Florence deserves her father's "scorn" (is that all it is?) for the offense of wanting someone on her own reflective level. In his own life, would Chesterton feel that he deserved to be humiliated by his parents if he married a woman who was extremely good-hearted but boringly pretty and intelligent instead of an equally good-hearted woman who was what Shakespeareans call a "natural"—which is to say, a mentally-challenged source of priceless comic moments? Chesterton is asking us to turn off our minds when we make judgments about such basic fictional rites as marriage. If we do, we are implicit champions of "art for art's sake," with as little reference as possible to our actual experience. One of several problems with this is that Chesterton didn't intend to be a part of the aesthetic school; he was an outspoken Roman Catholic and one of the tormentors of the great aesthete Oscar Wilde. Getting back to the novel itself, Malcolm Andrews observes, tellingly, that while Paul is "top-heavy," the good Toots is "almost literally, light-headed" (130).

9 Steven Marcus claims that Walter and Florence's love isn't credible because "Her affection for him is the love of a dutiful sister, nothing more" (355). This seems plausible until we ask what is meant by "sisterly love." Walter and Florence's agreement to be brother and sister obviously isn't literal. When they marry, there is nothing incestuous about it. The sibling references originate with Walter and Florence as a way to declare their love for each other while Florence is still very young, without any suggestion of sexual desire, which suggestion, in Victorian times, and considering their breeding, would be outlandish. Leaving the unconscious to Freud, it is obviously possible for love to take root without conscious passion. This ought to be good, since the love is less likely to be an ignis fatuus, inspired by desire. Surely the barrier Marcus sees dividing this kind of brother-sister love and later passion isn't supported by observation. Many relationships begin with unselfish affection and graduate to something more. There is no reason why Florence and Walter's brother-sister love couldn't develop into connubial love.

10 Jane Vogel deserves credit for pointing out what should be obvious, but is easy to overlook in such a big novel, that Dombey's egotism is introduced right at the beginning of the novel, where the reference to "A.D.," usually meaning "anno Domini" (the year of our Lord), is said to refer to "anno Dombey" (Vogel [66]; Dickens, [2]).

11 To make matters worse, Feenix gives a rambling speech during which he stuns everyone in the room by alluding to an amusing wedding he attended between a middle-aged man and great beauty much younger than himself. Since the punch line of this story is

the tradeoff of money for youth and beauty, the parallel to the current marriage is lost on no one, and Feenix's speech is followed by a deadly silence. Evidently insulated by a combination of cloudy thinking and elegant manners (as the narrator later mentions, he is always a gentleman), Feenix is oblivious of the offense he has given and wanders off on unsteady legs.

12 "Oh Floy," Paul effused one night when Florence was helping him with his absurdly hard studies at the Blimber school, "How I love you! How I love you, Floy!" (187)

13 One of the ironies of this situation is that Carker has enlisted Rob Toodle as his spy. Rob has been spoiled completely by his terrible experiences at the ragged school that Dombey sent him to, as a favor to Paul's first nurse, Polly. Rob is now sly and heartless. He has already betrayed Captain Cuttle and Florence, and the only person with whom he is willingly honest is Carker, who controls him through terror. If Carker is a "cat"—as he is continually called—Rob is his mouse.

14 Carker is killed in a most modern fashion; he is run over by a train while still in France.

15 John O. Jordon, a very Freudian critic in his approach to this and other novels of Dickens, sees Captain Cuttle as Florence's substitute father (128). The Captain is actually too deferential for the usual role of father, but that is exactly what Florence needs after the trauma she has come from.

16 This judgment isn't simply mine. Steven Marcus calls this scene an "unexpectedly successful episode" (354), which may have some significance, since Marcus is not happy with the story of Florence as a whole.

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