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## A Study of *Martin Chuzzlewit* —Women, Transgression, and Retribution—

Takanobu Tanaka

### I Introduction

*Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44) has an overall “design,” a grand unifying theme. This is the theme of selfishness and all its fruits and is loudly enunciated by old Martin and the narrator at the end of the first monthly number. Many critics such as J. Hillis Miller and Steven Marcus read the novel as centered around this theme, and regard old Martin as a sort of “human providence.”<sup>1</sup> Stuart Curran, arguing that the myth of the loss of Eden is central to the whole idea of the novel, identifies him with the “stern Deity of the Old Testament, the God of Truth.”<sup>2</sup> Old Martin restores justice and order, and brings a happy ending. This reading can be reviewed from a different perspective, that is, the father-son relationship when we notice old Martin is a patriarch. In fact, the theme is itself developed as centered around such relationships as old Martin and his grandson young Martin, Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son Jonas, Tom Pinch and his “father” Pecksniff, and Tom and his new father-figure old Martin after he knows Pecksniff’s true character.

But the novel also includes the elements incompatible with Victorian patriarchal middle-class society whose ideology supports this father-son relationship. Such heterogeneous elements as “Others” in class and gender transgress the boundaries of that society which aspires to homogeneity. Especially in this novel we should pay our attention

to a gender problem. It is true that the deliberate fraud by the bogus concern, Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Life and Loan Assurance Company, engineered by Tigg Montague causes disorder in society, but the transgression of the lower classes has already been taken up in a large scale in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841). The remarkable point in *Martin Chuzzlewit* is that the transgression of women as "Others" is conspicuously described for the first time in Dickens's novels. The patriarch old Martin walks straight to the door of Todgers's. But its surroundings are composed of such a labyrinth that even postmen wander hopelessly. When a man views it, the "revolving chimney-pots on one great stack of buildings" (132)<sup>3</sup> seem animistically to interrupt him, and to baffle sight of the prospect. It resists the look of surveillance shot for achieving stability in the center. Here what Dorothy Van Ghent calls the "submerged hysteria"<sup>4</sup> exists. The viewer is even faced with a disorganization of his subject.

...the tumult swelled into a roar; the host of objects seemed to thicken and expand a hundredfold; and after gazing round him, quite scared, he turned into Todgers's again, much more rapidly than he came out; and ten to one he told M. Todgers afterwards that if he hadn't done so, he would certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut: that is to say, head-foremost. (132)

This exactly emblemizes the strained relationship between men, members of the central world, and women, "Others" driven out to the periphery. Though men try to put everything in perfect order, their plan is not only frustrated but also involves danger that they are precipitated into chaos. In this paper, I examine, first of all, the gender characteristics of the patriarchal middle-class society, secondly how it is attacked by women and finally excludes them to maintain what it considers the natural status. Through these processes, the position of *Martin Chuzzlewit* will reveal itself among all Dickens's novels.



## II The Gender Characteristics of the Patriarchal Middle-Class Society

For society, women must be selfless without threatening the established hierarchy and men's hegemony. All they should do is to serve efficiently and smile vacantly. Mary Graham is described as "constant, self-denying, earnest, and devoted" (235), all attributes that would contribute to social stasis and stability. She not only serves men but even has a small measure of power over men without becoming a source of anxiety to the system. Beyond those, she has no significance of existence. She is only a "commodity" dealt in as the love object of such gentlemen as old Martin, Pecksniff, Tom, and young Martin, and I dare say would have been the love object of Jonas as well, if the author had not felt the need to make someone—namely, Merry Pecksniff—really suffer for the latter's violence. Tom's sister Ruth is lavishly modified by Dickens's favorite epithet "little" like the heroines in his earlier novels. Her aspect of an "angel in the house" is humorously and favorably emphasized. Both of them suggest the real and complex demands which society makes upon its feminine idols: they must be selfless while simultaneously possessing a powerful moral nature; they must remain ignorant of social and political problems but capable of assuring male relatives of their ability to succeed in the public realm; and they must act virtuously and naively while appearing sexually desirable to men. These are naturally shared by Dickens, a member of society. In the middle of the nineteenth century, an explicitly hierarchical view of woman as the second man was substituted by the horizontal ideology that the two were sexually different, and the necessity of partnership and a division of duties were expressed. But the discourses of Victorian patriarchy often masked oppression through such a paradigm of the separate, and different, but equal sexes.

When we bend our eyes on how men themselves are portrayed in society, we notice the feminine qualities within men. Nearly all of qualities Tom, in complimenting his adored sister, offers could be

applied to himself.

“you women, my dear, are so kind, and in your kindness have such nice perception; you know so well how to be affectionate and full of solicitude without appearing to be; your gentleness of feeling is like your touch: so light and easy, that the one enables you to deal with the wounds of the mind as tenderly as the other enables you to deal with wounds of the body.” (692-95)

Beth Herst sees in him a “decisive rejection of the conventional hero, substituting devotion, endurance, selflessness and other essentially passive virtues for the more romantic and more active which usually attend him.”<sup>5</sup> The androgynous Tom, whose emotionality and purity provide a moral center to the novel, was a new model of manliness and gentlemanliness in the later 1830s and the 1840s, which was produced from the reactions against the Georgian gentry and Dandyism. In this period, then, manliness carried distinct overtones of anti-masculinity. Instead such qualities as prudence, self-renunciation, sexual shyness, passivity in Tom were valued as Christian and social ideals. This encouraged the masculine veneration of the woman as the selfless, pure, Ministering Angel. Tom’s feminine qualities make him a “good angel” (488). Alexander Welsh says that “many English novels work round to a permanent connection between the hero and his good angel,”<sup>6</sup> but this angel is male instead of female in the novel. This male figure would change dramatically with, among other things, the muscular Christian movement of the 1850s and as a binary differentiation of gender made “effeminacy” a source of increasingly, particularly potent dread for men.

The male/male relationship is also emphasized without causing homophobia. The relationship between Tom and John Westlock, added to the marital relationship between Ruth and John and the brother-sister relationship between Tom and Ruth, is depicted not only as nonthreatening to a reproduction-valuing society but as laudable male



friendship, in the small household constituted by these three at the end of the novel. It is possible to interpret in a similar way the relationship between Mark Tapley and young Martin as far as androgyny is still a male prerogative. The former's propensity for self-sacrifice to the latter seems as discordant with later Victorian conception of masculinity as Tom's emotionality and vulnerability do, and assumes a dangerous aspect for society.

### III The Women Who Begin to Transgress the Boundaries

Do women remain submissive to the male hegemony like Mary and Ruth? Some of them begin to threaten society with imminent disorganization. The reason Merry agrees to marry Jonas is to "have the best of" him and "hate and teaze him" (397-98) all her life. Cherry's domination of Moddle involves the possibility of an inverted husband-wife relationship, as her declaration of independence from her father shakes a traditional dependency relationship. Moddle just follows her silently without any resistance "like a lamb to the altar" (698). What masculine energy he has is rapidly sucked dry. Though he originally left home to escape from his sister's domination, he is again taken "captive" (695). Women's self-assertion which the novel portrays as potentially deadly to men, is clearly differentiated from Ruth's "self-importance" (601).

Anxiety about troubling, transgressive women is sometimes realized. A certain widow of a deceased brother of old Martin is repeatedly modified by the adjective "strong-minded." She is described as a woman "who, if she could, would have established her claim to the title[strong-minded], and have shown herself, mentally speaking, a perfect Samson, by shutting up her brother-in-law in a private mad-house" (53). It is usually the women whom men judge to be deviant from social norms that are labeled as mad and imprisoned. But here such a "natural" situation is completely inverted. Moreover she is linked with men's death when George Chuzzlewit says that she has

“outlived three husbands, and suffered so very little from their loss” and “hooked and crooked” her way “into this family by getting on the blind side of some of its members before marriage, and manslaughtering them afterwards by crowing over them to that strong pitch that they were glad to die” (60). She is a malevolent opponent in a still vaguely defined, but bitter, struggle for power.

This widow’s malevolence is shown by her physical characteristics. She has a “dreary face and a bony figure and a masculine voice” (53). Her physical inscription of maleness is key. This is more clearly seen in another malevolent woman, the “sharp and acid” (751) Mrs. Prig who has the ability to drive the senile Chuffey, a parody of old Martin, mad: “...her voice was deeper and more like a man’s. She had also a beard” (409). Poll Sweedlepipe is attracted to her: “...but some little time elapsed before he[Young Bailey] could remove his friend[Poll] from the ground, owing to the impression wrought upon the barber’s nerves by Mrs. Prig, whom he pronounced, in admiration of her beard, to be a woman of transcendent charms” (469). Poll is an outright feminized, eunuchoid man with a “very small, shrill, treble voice” and a “tender heart” (416). He does not have so much secret energy as Tom who strikes Jonas down with a blow. Taking this point into consideration, we can see the potentialities for the inversion of power relationship between men and women. “A male female is repulsive,” Dickens reportedly said:<sup>7</sup> Such repulsion reflects the Victorian male obsession with a clear demarcation and codification of gender. At this basis lies the still influential ideology, though gradually outmoded in the 1840s, that while it was natural for men to have feminine qualities like Tom, the assumption of masculine qualities by women was practically unimaginable given “a chain of being” that defined women as lesser versions or imperfect replicas of men. But what should be taken notice of is Dickens simultaneously felt a “profound attraction of repulsion”<sup>8</sup> to masculine females. Otherwise he would not have repeatedly portrayed women of this kind, including Sally Brass in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41).



While the widow and Mrs. Prig cause men anxiety by their physical inscription of maleness, Mrs. Gamp does so by her maternity/femininity. It is symbolically shown by her words “‘I has my feelins as a woman,...and I have been a mother likeways’” (630) in this extraordinarily mother-absent world. She, a midwife, a nurse, and a performer of nameless offices about the persons of the dead, exists in the midst of birth and death and is mistress of the secrets of both. In fact, she is so little ruffled by these startling events that they are alike pleasant to her: “...she went to a lying-in or a laying-out with equal zest and relish” (316). She handles by herself what society regards as filth and excludes, that is to say, maternal things. Outside her lodgings many pregnant women gather as if they were female votaries, and her umbrella dominates a whole space as if it were a scepter. Her own universality is suggested in her “very fetch and ghost” (315) hanging up in at least a dozen places. Society cannot exclude her because she brings “discordance” and “unnaturalness.” It is true that she stands up for pregnant women to earn money, but when she angrily says to the locomotive, “‘Ugh!’...‘one might easy know you was a man’s invention, from your disregardless of the weakness of our natures, so one might, you brute!’” (626), she bitingly condemns men beyond the limits of her mere act of living. To make a condemnation is not all she does. When she pins her patient Lewsome’s “wandering arms against his sides, to see how he would look if laid out as a dead man” (410), and satisfies herself with that lovely corpse, she bears the image of a necrophile. Her action is beyond the reasonable explanation that it is only invited by her love of money, and disturbs the patriarchally-defined “natural” situation. It is true that her and Mrs. Prig’s treatment of their patients reflects the actual conditions of the untrained nurses of the early nineteenth century, but beyond historical interest they arouse male fears that female nurses will have a power over men. Around mid-century Florence Nightingale struggled to portray the profession of nursing as most properly “feminine” in the new binary division of roles and as a



form of service to men. But in this novel there is no such female nurse. The anxiety-provoking Mrs. Gamp is drawn in relation to male potency, too. Her late husband's wooden leg suggests her castrating ability because the wooden leg represents the loss of male potency. The more remarkable example is that she eats cucumbers by preference. Though this devouring of phallic food has been noted by Veronica M. S. Kennedy,<sup>9</sup> it must be connected to the general dread of transgressive women in the novel. When Mrs. Gamp, "with great feeling," says, "'Betsey Prig'... 'try the cowcubmers, God bless you!'" (415), we recognize a complicity between women in undermining the foundation of society.

These women are selfish only from the perspective of the patriarch old Martin. They are thought to be driven by self-interest and vanity, and are ranked among many selfish men. But when we notice that they live under the oppression strong enough to demand their self-effacement, their acts are not so easily settled as selfish. They seem to assert themselves in their lives. Especially such a woman as Mrs. Gamp who has to survive by herself possesses the strong-mindedness to blow off the narrow glossed-over moral laws of society. She is a realist confronting trouble without avoidance. In order to maintain life, she without reluctance sells her deceased husband's remains under the pretense of "for the benefit of science" (316). When she says "'I goes workin' for my bread, 'tis true, but I maintains my indepency,...and which I will till death'" and "'Don't try no impogician with the Nuss, for she will not abear it!'" (631), women's liberation and independence from men's restraints seems to reverberate. She is a triumphant expression of selfhood. It cannot be denied that she has weakness. She creates Mrs. Harris not only for her advertisement but as a mental prop. She cannot live without this "talisman against all earthly sorrows" (756). But her self-justification through her fabrication of Mrs. Harris includes the important problem that by whom women will be defined, which is seriously related to the continuance of Victorian patriarchy itself.



Such female self-assertion is moving across the Atlantic and threatens the hegemonic interests of men more radically. In America where everything concerned with the old suzerain is aggressively despised, women deny the traditional roles that they imply are unjustly mandated by oppressive men. The marked example is the rejection of "family duties" (294) by Mrs. Brick and her friends: "Mr. Bevan informed him[Martin] that domestic drudgery was far beneath the exalted range of these Philosophers, and that the chances were a hundred to one that neither of the three could perform the easiest woman's work for herself, or make the simplest article of dress for any of her children" (294). This offers a frontal challenge to the feminine idol of an "angel in the house." Instead they assert the rights of women. They are uniformly masculine, brash, verbally domineering. They sit "wedged together in a little phalanx by themselves" (271). The choice of the word "phalanx" gives a military cast to the women's physical separation from their husbands. Nay, it would be more appropriate to say "British men" rather than "their husbands." Because American men are already at the mercy of masculine females, like Pogrom falling into Mrs. Hominy's hand. This impressive masculine female, who looks like the "late Mr. Grimaldi [appearing] in the lappets of Mrs. Siddons" (368), is worth notice. She drives men, especially foreigners, mad in minutes, while Mrs. Prig may induce madness over a night or a long convalescence. Martin, exposed to her bullets of words, even dreams of murdering her. Of course he uses violence just in a dream as well as in America, but this suggests the extremest of society's retaliatory measures against transgressive women.

Dickens's attitude toward American women is poignant. The women who ignore their domestic duties are summarily branded as selfish. He portrays this kind of woman in the British Mrs. Jellyby of *Bleak House* (1852-53). She provides a later but similar comment on the potential for familial and social corruption when women seek interests outside of their homes. He attacks these women for their



disdain of the self-sacrifice demanded from mothers in a binary conceptualization of gender roles. Therefore the description of American women's external appearances can hardly be disregarded as merely humorous. Special attention should be paid to their lack of individuality: "... [they] were strangely devoid of individual traits of character, insomuch that any one of them might have changed minds with the other, and nobody would have found it out" (273). This phenomenon is not only applied to American women but to American men: "...but within the house and without, wherever half of a dozen people were collected together, there, in their looks, dress, morals, manners, habits, intellect, and conversation, were Mr. Jefferson Brick, Colonel Diver, Major Pawkins, General Choke, and Mr. La Fayette Kettle, over, and over, and over again. They did the same things; said the same things; judged all subjects by, and reduced all subjects to, the same standard" (349). The whole of American society is characterized by monotony. It is this that causes American women to ignore their domestic duties. "'Devotions and lectures are our balls and concerts,'" says the sympathetic Bevan to Martin, and then adds, "'They [Mrs. Jefferson Brick and two other ladies] go to these places of resort, as an escape from monotony'" (294). This indicates that Dickens regards their acts as a wrong way of escaping from the American social evil of monotony; moreover, a malignant wen signifying that evil.

#### IV Retribution against Transgressive Women

Though the appearance of women who are too independent to fulfill their domestic duties is still an American phenomenon, even in Britain some women try to invert a domestic hierarchy. But against them the patriarchal society decisively takes retaliatory measures. Here the observer Dickens's distance from American women disappears. His condemnation bears not humorous touches but seriousness out of anxiety. The remarkable example is his treatment of Merry. She

accepts Jonas's proposal with her intention of having him her own way after marriage. What is important is that her disastrous choice is in direct disregard of the advice of old Martin, who cautions her to "[t]hink, and speak, and act, for once, like an accountable creature" (397). The woman who intends to invert the hierarchy in disregard of the patriarch's advice receives violent retribution from society, to be subjugated. In fact, the blows of her husband render her docile, polite, sober, and far less self-centered. She is finally transformed into one more angelic Mary, an "accountable creature." She apologizes to old Martin for being "obdurate" and calls her "trouble" from Jonas her "friend, for without it, no one could have changed me; nothing could have changed me" (822). Her sufferings have been fully repaid. Old Martin protects the reformed Merry as one of his "daughters" (817), as well as Mary and Ruth, to increase the number of "angel[s] in the house." This development shows society is ready to use violence to transgressive women. While it is obvious that the novel has little overt tolerance for Jonas's brutalization of Merry, it also betrays the violent consequences of its anxiety over gender in the change that takes place in her during her marriage.

Old Martin's important role in relation to Merry is repeatedly fulfilled in his relation to other transgressive women. In the denouement he fixes every person's fate according to his or her merits and demerits as if he himself were the Father. He admonishes Cherry, on the very day of her wedding with Moddle, to have pity on Merry and not to be drunk with triumph over her: "I should like to see a better parting between you [Cherry and Merry]. I should like to see a better parting on your side, in such circumstances. It would make me your friend. You may want a friend one day or other" (824). Just after she rejects old Martin's proposal defiantly, she is deserted by Moddle as if it were a divine punishment. As a result the inversion of power relationship between husband and wife is avoided. Old Martin cautions Mrs. Gamp to have a "little less liquor, and a little more humanity, and a little less regard for herself, and a little



more regard for her patients, and perhaps a trifle of additional honesty" (810), and threatens her specifically with the Old Bailey, a symbol of law and order. She makes her exit in a swoon. The "selfish" women who awake male anxiety seem to be all excluded.

At the end of the novel, anxiety over an inverted hierarchy is calmed down within society as well. A normal father-son relationship is restored. Jonas dies tragically as a punishment for his patricidal plan. It turns out that Anthony forgave Jonas though he noticed his son's plan; moreover, he blamed himself for having sown that seed. Anthony is presented as an affectionate and generous father, not as a selfish and avaricious one which he was during his lifetime. The restored relationship between the two Martins is the most appropriate example of normalization. Through young Martin's reform after trials, his frank apology to his grandfather, and old Martin's positive attitude that he should realize his own error, both of them make a compromise with each other, and young Martin has a legitimate right to inherit his grandfather's property. The fear of transgression by the lower classes as "Others" also vanishes with the murder of Tigg. And now the mobile competitive society dominated by selfishness and self-assertion has been changed into the static one propped by an inflexible hierarchy. Only "selfless" men can reap such rewards as money, marriage, and a social position. For them marriage is equivalent to the possession of the women who will serve them as handmaidens. Young Martin and John possess Mary and Ruth respectively, and Mark possesses both Mrs. Lupin and her property by converting both of their names into his own. "Selflessness" as mentioned here is a virtue only from a male perspective.

But can male anxiety over transgressive women be truly calmed? Though old Martin smiles satisfactorily as if the affair were settled after he denounces Mrs. Gamp, she simply wanders off in a contrived daze that indicates she remains "selfish" and unreformed. Cherry too, after recovering from a swoon, establishes an inverted power relationship with her father by dominating and verbally abusing him.



They are not so easily beaten into submission as Merry is. Far from that, the fact that the strong-minded woman is accompanied by three daughters “of gentlemanly deportment” (53) suggests that the traits of the mother are being passed along and exponentially increased in the next generation. Though there is no imminence because they are “spinster[s]” (53), those traits will surely be inherited to Mrs. MacStinger who makes Captain Bunsby’s future look gloomy and her three daughters in the next novel *Dombey and Son* (1846-48). While *Martin Chuzzlewit* attempts to fix patriarchy, it suggests the opposite force is at work to undermine it.

The factors causing instability are not only on the periphery of society. Society itself, though it looks homogeneous, still involves heterogeneous elements. One of them is seen in Tom who stands at the moral center of the novel. Michael Steig suggests that “Tom Pinch is the most fully developed character in the work, as he is the only one with a discernible inner life, and the only one whose psychological development is presented in detail.”<sup>10</sup> His analysis, presenting a quasi-Oedipal interpretation of Tom’s relationship with Mary and Pecksniff, illustrates his sexual frustration. This frustration is not overcome even toward the end of the novel. It comes up to the surface as his inclination for chaos. Covent Garden, one of his favorite places, is a non-daily carnivalesque space constituted by “ducks and fowls, with necks unnaturally long,” “live birds in coops and cages, looking much too big to be natural, in consequence of those receptacles being much too little; rabbits, alive and dead, innumerable” (621-22) and so on. Furthermore, the innumerable steam-boats he sees also hold order-destroying energy in secret: “There they lay, alongside of each other; hard and fast for ever, to all appearance, but designing to get out somehow, and quite confident of doing it” (622). These scenes reflect his suppressed inside. In chapter 4, Tom was attracted to an “exceeding wild and dissipated city” Salisbury teemed with “all kinds of mystery and bedevilment” (69) and the hurly-burly of its market. He essentially remains the



same as he was. Dickens, however, at the end presents to the reader Tom as an exclusively amiable character who has arrived at the stage of self-realization and self-denial in an "Age of Self" of the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> It implies that, after all, we need not take his mental conflict with the heightened love for Mary very seriously. Dickens, with sentimental and patronizing language, preaches to Tom about what his heart should be—and of course it must not be resentful, jealous, or envious.

Thy life is tranquil, calm, and happy, Tom. In the soft strain which ever and again comes stealing back upon the ear, the memory of thine old love may find a voice perhaps; but it is a pleasant, softened, whispering memory, like that in which we sometimes hold the dead, and does not pain or grieve thee, God be thanked! (831-32)

And then Tom's seemingly pure relationship with his sister, not with Mary who can be an object of his lust, appeals to the reader as a harmony-filled future for men and women with a combination of love and patriarchally-defined "selflessness." But this ending is rather abrupt, and never erases Tom's destructive energy from the reader's mind. The heterogeneous which threatens to undermine the stability of society lurks even in the good-natured Tom to the last.

Young Bailey's regeneration at the end is also a risk factor for the future stability of patriarchy. He seems to have interested more recent critics. Branwen Bailey Pratt finds his attraction in "his natural rebellion against being molded to a pattern."<sup>12</sup> He, the embodiment of freedom and vitality, denies every ideal of the world that creates the Old Bailey. Young Martin is essentially a duplicate of old Martin, but Young Bailey is the polar opposite of his "father," Old Bailey. Though this "anarchic" man from a patriarchal perspective has been supposed to die, he turns out to be still alive at the end. Together with his repeated circular motion which is opposed to the linear stream of time in society, he makes his exit with Mrs. Gamp

and the outright feminized male Sweedlepipe. This trio seems to symbolize the female transgression into patriarchal order, the latent chaos it involves, and its gradual weakening.

## V Conclusion

As mentioned above, a feminine idol ordained by men in the patriarchal middle-class society with male/male relationship as its axis is attacked by women on a large scale for the first time in Dickens's novels. Society reacts sensitively to transgressive women, and will maintain a "natural" condition even with resort to violence. Violence is both condemned and implicitly justified. Finally the novel turns to sentimentality in an effort to resolve its own difficulties, and reinforces patriarchy with a normal father-son relationship as its axis. But even at the end, male anxiety over transgressive women has not yet been completely calmed. As if in response to them, heterogeneous elements continue to smolder within society supposed to be homogenized. James R. Kincaid says that, linguistically speaking, the novel has both the "drive toward that which is ascertainable and accountable [and] a feeling of artistic free play, a parody of truth-telling and truth-seeking."<sup>13</sup> Likewise, two conflicting forces are found to function when the novel is grasped in a gender perspective. The force against the order-directed flow operates in a whole novel. The process of fixing patriarchy is to the end accompanied by the potential jeopardy of fluidization by women. This strained condition is an attraction never seen in Dickens's earlier novels.

Historical background must be taken into consideration when we think of the reason that transgressive women appear at a burst in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In the 1840s a class problem represented by Chartism occurred and the realization of an inverted hierarchy threatened the ruling classes. As to feminism, a women's movement did not become well-organized and vocal yet in Britain, but Dickens saw its spread with his own eyes when he visited America in 1842. He



was naturally anxious about these radical movements as a member of Victorian patriarchal society, but at the same time he began to suspect the rigidity of the established system. While he considered order right, he was fascinated by the energetic and formidable women on the periphery rather than the boring men fitted into a frame.

From *Martin Chuzzlewit* downward, transgressive women are to be portrayed one after another. Before this novel, they were, if ever, ironically and grotesquely shown mainly with physically masculine characteristics. An inverted power relationship between husband and wife was merely humorously described. But with this novel, women's orientation to power becomes obvious. They, like Mrs. Gamp, begin to assert maternity/femininity, and as a result the perfect restoration of order is impossible even at the end. Patriarchy is increasingly challenged by them, and in the face of continuing fluidity gradually loses its absolute authority. Mrs. MacStinger and her three daughters in *Dombey and Son* belong to the lower classes, and so are not a direct threat to the patriarchal middle-class society. They only play minor parts principally for arousing the reader's laughter. But we see by far the more noticeable woman in Edith. Her portrait never has those comic aspects seen in the women of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, but is seriously related to the discovery of a whole plot itself. Furthermore in Dickens's later novels, women's masculine intelligence and spirituality, whose existence is not accepted yet around the time of *Martin Chuzzlewit* because men are regarded as superior to women, will become observable. Their challenges gradually involve his criticism and warning against the status quo. From the perspective of the change of transgressive women, *Martin Chuzzlewit* includes new types of female figures as well as physically masculine women. Therefore this novel marks Dickens's important turning point as a transitional novel, in points not only of a unifying theme but of a depiction of women, between the earlier, more fluidly extemporized works and the later, more comprehensively, architectonic novels.

NOTES

- 1 J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1958) 142.
- 2 Stuart Curran, "The Lost of Paradises of *Martin Chuzzlewit*," *NCF* 25 (1970-71): 64.
- 3 All references to *Martin Chuzzlewit* are to The Clarendon Dickens (1982). Page number is given in parentheses after the quoted material.
- 4 Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," *The Dickens Critics*, ed. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1961) 229.
- 5 Beth Herst, *The Dickens Hero: Selfhood and Alienation in the Dickens World* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1990) 31.
- 6 Alexander Welsh, *The City of Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971) 181.
- 7 Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (London: Dent, 1983) 316.
- 8 John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. A. J. Hoppé, vol. 1 (London: Dent, 1969) 14.
- 9 Veronica M. S. Kennedy, "Mrs. Gamp as the Great Mother: A Dickensian Use of the Archetype," *The Victorian Newsletter* 41 (Spring 1972): 3.
- 10 Michael Steig, "*Martin Chuzzlewit*: Pinch and Pecksniff," *Studies in the Novel* 1 (Summer 1969): 181.
- 11 But also, Jerome Hamilton Buckley observes that

The so-called age of individualism was remarkably conscious of the individual's limitations; and it preached the sober doctrine of self-denial quite as persuasively as the more facile gospel of self-help.

See *The Victorian Temper* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1951) 91.

- 12 Branwen Bailey Pratt, "Dickens and Freedom: Young Bailey in *Martin Chuzzlewit*," *NCF* 30 (1975): 198.
- 13 James R. Kincaid, "'All the Wickedness in the World is Print': Dickens and Subversive Interpretation," *Victorian Literature and Society*, ed. James R. Kincaid and Albert J. Kuhn (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State UP, 1984) 270.