



DICKENS AND THE SINS OF SOCIETY

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## Introduction

During the Middle Ages, authors of such works as *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales* employed allegorical characters and situations to correct problematic behavior through social, political, and religious instruction; they utilized the behavior of flat allegorical figures to highlight individual sins and institutional problems in social behavior. More specifically, one can find the allegory of the Seven Deadly Sins appearing in literature throughout history. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* was written shortly after Langland's *Piers Plowman* in the late fourteenth century, during the sixteenth century, Edmund Spenser wrote his allegorical *The Fairy Queen*, and John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the seventeenth century.

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* follows a fascinating literary tradition, the allegorical journey, which is featured in dream visions like *Piers Plowman* and later in Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, which is sometimes likened to a chivalric romance. Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* reflects the influence of medieval allegory, popularized by the morality play, in the English literary tradition, by employing an allegorical use of the Seven Deadly Sins parallel to Chaucer's and uses these allegorical figures to urge social and individual reform. Chaucer's "Parson's Tale" mimics a typical fourteenth century moral exegesis on the Seven Deadly Sins, "a tract on penance" (Benson 21). Fredrick Tupper argues that, though rather out of fashion today, Chaucer's "General Prologue" utilizes an allegorical portrayal of the Seven Deadly Sins through the portraits of his

pilgrims (107). While the theory may not resonate with the modern reader the way it would with the Victorian reader, given that Tupper's theory appears on the heels of the nineteenth-century, perhaps he is expressing a lingering fascination with Chaucer and allegory that colored Victorian criticism. Fredrick Tupper's study notes Chaucer's use of the allegorical theme of the Seven Deadly Sins, and while his study was written in 1914, it is referenced in Robert P. Miller's *Allegory in the Canterbury Tales*. He notes that the interpretation in Chaucer was a recurring topic in scholarship during the 1950's (Miller 327). In his examination of Chaucer's use of allegory written in the early 1960's, D.W. Robertson notes that

the symbolism of modern poetry, which is most typically a vehicle for the expression of mood or emotion, has no counterpart in the Middle Ages; and medieval allegory, which is a vehicle for the expression of traditional ideas, has with a few exceptions no counter part in modern poetry. Our critical disdain for allegory thus rests partly on the fact that the concept of allegory as it was understood in the Middle Ages has little relevance to modern literature" (286).

However, by exploring allegory within Chaucer, we can rediscover an interesting literary history of the allegorical portrayal of the Seven Deadly Sins and the way in which this allegory finds expression in the nineteenth-century.

The allegory calls out to inquisitive readers as they turn through the pages of Dickens's text. His characters at times seem more caricatures or types than human and

rounded, and the astute reader cannot help but analyze the wayward Steerforth, who “steers forth” on a collision course with doom, or the devious pariah, Heep, whose inability to control his limbs reflects his baser nature. Dickens’s *David Copperfield* is a refreshing revision of the medieval allegory particularly reflecting the influence of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Their works utilize similar vice figures, suggesting that Dickens was working with a similar model, but to his own purpose, to motivate the Victorian middle and lower classes to change the class social system. It is the aim of this text to illustrate the way that Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* is situated within this allegorical tradition, and, particularly, it is the purpose of this study to examine the relation of Chaucer’s use of allegory to Dickens’s text.

The link between Chaucer and Dickens emerges through the examination of Dickens’s nineteenth century audience. Carolyn P. Collette notes that “Chaucer himself [was seen] as a sign of preeminent Englishness at the heart of nineteenth-century English life” (115). While Dickens’s familiarity with John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a work familiar to many Victorian readers, presented a more contemporary site of medieval allegory, a careful reading of Dickens’s work suggests connections to Chaucer’s own use of medieval allegory. During the Victorian era, Chaucer was a popular topic for critics, and it is the goal of this work to examine the way in which Chaucer, who for the Victorian reader was a bastion of Englishness, was also an inspiration for Dickens’s own literary work.



Allegory is manipulated uniquely according to the era in which it is employed. Greek and Roman rhetoricians were the first to employ allegory. According to John MacQueen, the Roman writer Quintilian noted that

Allegory. . . presents either (1) one thing in words and another in meaning or else (2) something absolutely opposed to the meaning of the words . . .

Under (1) he discussed the use of metaphor, simile and riddle (*aengima*) in a way which bears a direct relation to the modern use of the term. (49)

Both secular and biblical scholars made use of allegory. MacQueen notes that allegory exists in two species, narrative and figurative. Narrative allegory involves a plot that may be examined and deciphered on many levels. Figural allegory involves a certain figure that symbolizes specific physical and mental attributes. Both types can be found in biblical allegory (18). For instance figural allegory is present in such symbols as the lamb, which represents Christ, and biblical parables such as the Parable of Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) are representative of narrative allegory. Specific elements of allegory may seem rather generic, particularly personification, or the use of commentary and analysis within the action of a narrative.

However, allegory is a mode that may be used in various genres from the satirical allegory and allegorical journey, debate and dream vision found in *Piers Plowman*, allegorical chivalric romance found in the *Faerie Queen*, to allegorical journey employed in *Pilgrim's Progress* (Clifford 6). While it may be difficult for modern readers to perceive allegorical references, as I will illustrate later, a medieval audience would have

been accustomed to interpret such oral and or textual inferences. According to Robert P. Miller, author of “Allegory in the Canterbury Tales,” medieval allegory is perceived as way of thinking, a mental predisposition, more than any formal method of creative construction. The medieval allegorical mindset, which was borrowed from classical antiquity, was cultivated in medieval schools of thought, principally as it was utilized for the interpretation of Scripture. An intricate and widely understood “library of ‘authority’” yielded a “characteristic ‘language.’” There are many ways that this language of allegorical imagery, which has its own specific associations that are established by the tradition, might be employed (Miller 328).

Miller distinguishes three interconnected activities that contribute to a unified “literary vocabulary. These are the analysis of what was called the Book of Nature, the exposition of the Scripture and the allegorization of the pagan classics” (302-303). Miller explains that iconography found in nature developed in texts such as bestiaries and physiognomies; he notes that nature was often significant. For instance the camel was a sign of humility (330). These natural signs were essential in aiding Scriptural analysis. Church fathers such as Jerome and Augustine used Scriptural allegory in order to discover the “spirit” within the “veil of the letter” (Miller 330). Their work influenced compilations like the *Allegoriae in sacram scriparia*. Such authoritative exegesis was compiled in the *Glossa ordinaria*, which supplemented the Bible. Those interpreting texts might use various citations to assist in the understanding of a text (Miller 331). In “The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Literary Gardens,” D.W Robertson discusses the

connotations that developed concerning the Biblical image of the garden. At one point he notes that

[m]any gardens are little more than groves of trees, and still others have a tree as a central feature. Some notice of the significance of the tree is still familiar, since it occupies a very important position in the story of the Fall, which involves the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; and the Redemption involves another tree, the Tree of Life, or The Cross. In the Middle Ages, the very important position of these trees in Biblical narrative gives rise to an enormous complex of associations. (25)

Biblical commentary developed a way in which to read the Bible as an extensive text involving what Miller terms as an “interrelated figurative context” (331). Allegory developed into a multipurpose tool used by authors to deliver a message.

During the Middle Ages, the illiterate public was educated about religious matters through the use of iconography and symbolism. Medieval sermons used allegory to personify the Seven Deadly Sins as well as the Cardinal Virtues. While Justice was known by her symbolic sword, Envy was portrayed with her snake. These images were reinforced through sermonizing and the allegorical exemplum that used secular or religious anecdotes (Wickham 110). For example, an author of a morality play might use the framework of a drinking metaphor, which entailed the use of a tavern and its keeper wherein the keeper represented the Devil and the tavern hell. Other patrons would represent those waylaid by the temptations that the Devil offered in order to ensnare

mankind (Wickham 111). Moreover, the morality play often featured the attack on “Everyman” or “Mankind” by the Seven Deadly Sins (Wickham 114). While there is no textual evidence of either play prior to the fifteenth century, we know that morality plays were popular around the era of guild pageants, and the earliest documentation of the morality play is the reference to the lost *Paternoster Play* of York alluded to in Wyclif’s *De Officio Pastoralis* (1378) (Cawley xv). The *Paternoster Play* personified the vices and virtues in a similar manner to the later moralities (Cawley xv). Robert Potter notes significant similarities between the French Morality play *Liège Moralité des Sept Péchés Mortels et des Sept Vertus* and Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* (28). Potter notes that the *Liège Play* was similar to the *York Paternoster Play* that was virtually lost with the exception of indirect record (23). While we can not know for certain, the popularity of the morality play during the fourteenth century suggests that Chaucer would have been familiar with this form of popular drama.

Chaucer followed in the footsteps of his contemporaries, utilizing personifications of the Seven Deadly Sins in order to focus the reader’s attention not only on the failings of the individual, which he illustrates in his comical “General Prologue,” but also on the problems manifest within his society. As well as the morality tradition, Chaucer’s work, according to Vance Smith, author of “Chaucer as an English Writer,” is indebted to Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, especially Langland’s use of pilgrimage and estates satire (91-92). Estates satire, a literary genre, is properly defined as “a satiric representation of all classes of society” (Mann 1). Using narrative allegory, Chaucer’s “General Prologue”

explores the theme of the pilgrimage. Carolynn Van Dyke, author of *The Fiction of Truth*, claims that during, “the Middle ages [allegory] was a method of exegesis operating upon a prior text or upon a ‘literal’ story within a present text . . . the prior text or story carries its own preallegorical meaning” (16). Chaucer utilizes the construct of the pilgrimage to preface his *Canterbury Tales*; the pilgrimage, while a literal journey for his own pilgrim, also relates to many other allegorical pilgrimages, such as that of *Piers Plowman*. He also utilizes figural allegory within several of the portraits of his pilgrims who represent the Seven Deadly Sins, such as the Wife of Bath who also represents the sin of Pride, Chaucer’s Man of Law who represents Envy, the shaking Summoner who embodies Wrath, Chaucer’s idle Monk who symbolizes Sloth, the greedy Pardoner who represents Avarice, the Franklin who embodies the sin of Gluttony, and the frisky Friar who embodies the sin of Lust. D.W. Robertson, almost fifty years after Fredrick Tupper, author of *Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins*, provides an extensive review of Chaucer’s use of biblical allegory in *A Preface to Chaucer*, arguing that Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* be read exegetically (290). He notes that “[s]ince comparisons between scriptural allegory and poetic allegory were common among poets and humanists in the fourteenth-century, it would be strange if Chaucer did not make one [such comparison] too” (367). Robertson suggests that Chaucer’s work inherently lends itself to an allegorical reading. Likewise, Siegfried Wenzel claims that it is very natural to envision Chaucer within an extensive tradition and that, “such details as the quoted Scriptural passage, together with numerous other biblical figures, similes, and even exempla, had gathered firmly around a

given vice or character-type” (18). Given the interesting ties that develop when one examines the *Canterbury Tales*, evidence suggests that Chaucer was indeed allegorically employing the Seven Deadly Sins.

Medieval allegory in the hands of a medieval poet like Chaucer is an amalgam of biblical and classical allegorical influence. Robertson notes that “[a] medieval exegete frequently selects only certain details from a context with which to construct his allegory” (299). Medieval allegory makes use of “figurative material” derived from scriptural symbols and ideas, non-scriptural yet moral-laden natural history, and classical myths and astrology (389). Reading Chaucer through such an historical lens and taking into consideration the influence of allegory upon literature can reveal rich meaning in his text. Therefore, the way in which allegory is expressed within the *Canterbury Tales* is not necessarily a singularity, a fixed matter of allegorical doctrine, as it is occasionally perceived (Miller 328). Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* uses a “characteristic language,” relating central ideas that were ingrained into the social consciousness.

When read allegorically, the “General Prologue” becomes an introduction to the Seven Deadly Sins, as will be illustrated here in Chapters One and Two. The pilgrims Chaucer briefly sketches within the “Prologue” begin to take on a greater significance. His use of medieval allegory in the “General Prologue” contrasts with “The Parson’s Tale,” which resembles a fourteenth century sermon, while the “Prologue” presents a cast of characters. “The Parson’s Tale” is based on two twelfth century treatises “a treatise on penance by Raymund of Pennafore and a treatise on the Deadly Sins by William Peraldus

(Benson 21). Chaucer's Parson gives the reader a detailed description of the Seven Deadly Sins that harkens back to the allegorical pilgrims of the "General Prologue." In the prologue itself, the pilgrims mirror the vice figures that often roam the medieval morality play or sermon.

While allegory can be said to have influenced medieval literature, further study reveals that the allegorical tradition did not end with the Middle Ages, nor did Chaucer's influence. A broader exploration of allegory reveals a literary tradition in which the Victorian's *David Copperfield* figures. Allegory, be it classical, medieval, or early modern is a seemingly timeless instrument employed within both religious and secular works. However, throughout history

critical discussions have suggested that the realms of allegorical and historical writing repeatedly blend into each other . . . the critical study of 'allegorical' composition itself not only extends beyond an emphasis on abstract agents; it also comes to associate 'allegorical' expression with broad disparities in figurative language that it implicates with the problematic disjunctions of time. With an orientation of this kind, the interpretation of texts considered 'allegorical' is not a mere evocation of timeless paradigms, but an exposé of temporal dilemmas. In effect, such critical developments suggest that while 'history' incorporates (if often silently) allegorical configurations, 'allegory' exhibits (if often obliquely) historical concerns. (Whitman 282-283)

This suggests that Chaucer's particular use of allegory is specific, and though allegorical readings of the *Canterbury Tales* are now somewhat out of fashion, Jill Mann notes that, "It is cliché of Chaucer criticism that the Canterbury pilgrims are both individuals and types" (187). Fredrick Tupper's "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins" and John Livingston Lowes' rebuttal "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins" were both written during the early twentieth-century, and Ralph Baldwin's *The Unity of the Canterbury Tales* was written in 1955. D.W. Robertson's *A Preface to Chaucer* (1962) contrasted with his New Criticism contemporaries who were interested in removing Chaucer from his historical context (Saunders 14). Literary criticism has since moved on. While the 1970's reintroduced an interest in literary and cultural history and situated Chaucer within his own social context, the 1980's introduced Marxist and sociological approaches. Contemporary Chaucer criticism has branched out into other areas such as "reception theory, reader response theory, semiotics and linguistic philosophy, deconstruction and psychoanalytic theory, gender theory" (Saunders 16). Though contemporary critics are no longer concerned with analyzing allegory within the *Canterbury Tales*, there is evidence to be explored here that Chaucer's Victorian audience did read his works allegorically; so perhaps it is valuable to revisit this approach again here. Such a reading may also illuminate a tradition that finds reflection in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. Though we cannot, as Whitman's study suggests, assume that Dickens's use of allegory resonates with the same sentiments to a Victorian reader as



to Chaucer's, examining the influence of medieval allegory upon Dickens's novel yields a richer reading of both Chaucer and Dickens's text.

During the nineteenth-century, many novels implemented a journey theme. While not always allegorical, these novels often centered on the development of a single figure faced with adversity along his or her pathway to self-discovery. In his introduction to the *Oxford World's Classics* edition of *David Copperfield*, Andrew Sanders states that "[t]he novel is an attempt to capture and analyze a fleeting past, a numbering of David's days in order that he might apply his disciplined heart 'unto wisdom'" (Dickens vii). What Sanders has captured is the essence of Dickens's novel and many other novels written during the nineteenth century. The pattern follows the course of the *Bildungsroman*, which, as John R. Maynard notes, centers on the growth of the individual as well as social and cultural development (qtd. in Brantlinger et. al. 279-281). What this path to self-discovery evokes is the journey of the pilgrim, a journey that harkens to a rich literary heritage that has impacted not only the work of Dickens but also the works of many Victorian novelists. While my analysis of *David Copperfield* as an allegory is hardly new, the text warrants deeper inspection than either of the fascinating studies by Jane Vogel, in her *Allegory in Dickens*, or Theresa R. Love, in her *Dickens and the Seven Deadly Sins* provides.

Like the pilgrim in the tale of Chaucer, Spenser, or even Bunyan, which will be discussed later, David must navigate personal trials. Both Love and Vogel argue that Dickens's work is laced with his own religious beliefs and that Dickens sought to

influence the actions of others through a form of sermonizing. Love claims that “[i]n Dickens’s way of thinking, the moral sickness of the age might be remedied if his fellowmen would only root out pride and greed and lust from their hearts and plant therein a Christian love which would make looking out for the welfare of their brothers essential to their own happiness” (xx). Although the tale may share these elements, the values that are revealed throughout David’s pilgrimage seem less a product of his own moral decisions than an extension of Dickens’s message. Rather than focus on David’s journey, the allegorical use of the Seven Deadly Sins emphasizes the ills of society. As it will be illustrated in Chapter Two, Dickens employs the morality tradition, as it finds expression in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, in order to draw his readers away from their own personal sins into a greater awareness of society’s dysfunctional structure. In an effort to reach a Victorian public whose moral foundations had been shaken, Dickens employs medieval allegory and social satire to illustrate the ills of the Victorian society.

“Why should Dickens,” D.A. Miller asks, “choose the elitist mode of allegory, which inevitably constitutes its readers as a ‘chosen few’” (474). Perhaps the answer lies in understanding allegory’s Englishness or rather, as Carolyn Collette has suggested, Chaucer’s Englishness. Collette notes that during the mid-nineteenth century critics of Chaucer believed in the timeless importance of literature and that literature had a very real significance to life that the critics could translate for their readership(115). This, she notes, was the age of the literary journal, whose criticism was intertwined with political

concerns. It was an age of an interest in medievalism, Pugin, and Young England, and a time in which many authors compared their own problem-riddled society with an idealized past (Collette 116). Many of the journals, regardless of ideology, printed material on medieval history, literature, and religion as a way in which to analyze their own era, and “[s]peculation, inference, interpretation of things medieval in general and Chaucerian in particular often appeared as gospel truth to a public anxious for instruction” (Collette 116). While the cultural discourse on Chaucer would have impacted Dickens, he was also influenced by Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which Barbara A. Johnson claims “represents the final flowering of medieval pilgrimage allegory as well as the starting point for the novel in England.” (78).

However, attitudes toward allegory during the nineteenth-century were not wholly favorable. As Gay Clifford, the author of *The Transformations of Allegory* notes, “Hazlitt, Coleridge, Yeats, and countless of their contemporaries and inheritors assume that allegory is a matter of imposition: it curbs the freedom of the writer and imposes the reader to the point of bullying or boredom” (117). Still, medievalism was a significant literary issue during the nineteenth-century. Authors such as Scott and Tennyson utilized medieval themes, and Judith Johnson argues that George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* also employed medieval allegory and was influenced by the works of Langland, Chaucer, and Bunyan (77-78).

Though the morality tradition in which the Seven Deadly Sins flourished was no longer a popular genre during the nineteenth century, a careful study of Dickens’s *David*

*Copperfield* suggests that he was influenced by earlier authors who had employed the trope; in 1840 his own library was known to contain the works of Chaucer, Spenser, Marlowe, and Dekker, all of whom employed the procession of the Seven Deadly Sins (Thurin 203). Since Dickens's library was filled with those authors who had participated in the medieval morality tradition, it is reasonable that such authors may have influenced Dickens's own work. In a note in *All The Year Round*, Dickens writes, "[t]he statements and opinions of this Journal, generally, are, of course, to be received as the statements and opinions of its Conductor" (419). In both of Dickens's periodicals, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, Chaucer is discussed in over 200 pieces including articles, advertisements, and fiction pieces (British Periodicals I & II). It is possible that the writing of many well-read authors of the era was impacted, perhaps even subconsciously, by such great allegorical authors of the past. Then again, Roland Barthes notes, "The essential meaning of a work depends on the impressions of the reader, rather than the 'passions' or 'tastes' of the writer; 'a text's unity lies not in its origins,' or its creator, 'but in its destination,' or its audience" (148). When examining Dickens's *David Copperfield*, audience becomes a critical factor in the analysis of the text. While one may find clues to suggest that Dickens was utilizing allegory, it is just as critical to understand the perceptions of his audience. Perhaps what is rendered through an examination of Victorian culture, the Medieval revival and its impact on the literary impressions of Victorians, is an understanding of the Victorian perspective.

In Chapter One, I examine the allegorical nature of the fiendish characters that parade throughout *David Copperfield*. Like the medieval allegory, which found expression within the works of Chaucer, Spenser and Bunyan, Dickens's novel features a parade of the Seven Deadly Sins. Chapter One will illuminate the allegorical tradition in which the Seven Deadly Sins appear, and later flourish, in the work of Chaucer and the scholarship linking Dickens's work to this tradition. Chapter Two will analyze the way in which the Sins themselves emerge in the text of *David Copperfield* and their evocation of earlier uses of the trope, centrally that of Chaucer. Chapter Three reveals Dickens's objective in using the allegorical trope of the Seven Deadly Sins within *David Copperfield* through an examination of the novel, as well as Dickens's letters, periodicals, and other fiction. The chapter will illustrate that *David Copperfield* was not a platform for moral sermonizing. Rather than attempting to save the souls of humanity, Dickens's novel turned a critical lens on the class structure of society in a humanitarian effort to effect a change in education and the political arena that would result in a change in human welfare.

## Chapter I

### **Dickens in the Allegorical Tradition**

The use of allegory in *David Copperfield* harkens to the medieval tradition. The Seven Deadly Sins—Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust—were an important part of medieval religious preacher’s manuals, drama, and later secular literature. Understanding literary tradition is central in grasping the allegory found within Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, as the discussion of literary tradition is a popular topic in periodicals during the early to mid nineteenth-century. The journals “created a habit of association between the nineteenth-century and the Middle Ages, so that one often appeared in respect to the other . . . these journals felt it their duty to educate and to form public taste” (Collette 116). Literary tradition reveals a pattern in the works of such authors as Langland, Chaucer, Spenser and Bunyan that are comparable to the patterns that emerge in Dickens’s *David Copperfield*. It is my hope that in illuminating this tradition, the reader will grasp the extent to which this tradition impacted literature throughout the Middle Ages well into the nineteenth-century.

The Seven Deadly Sins appear first in Old English texts in scenes of battle in which the souls of men are attacked by sins embodied in animal form (Bloomfield 108). Bloomfield discusses the Anglo-Saxon poem *A Warning Against Pride* which tells of the attack upon an arrogant man by animals that represent Pride, Gluttony and Envy. The poem notes that Pride attacks individuals with flying darts. It is a rare but important example of an Old English poem that tells of the cardinal sins (109). Such tales were

followed by homilies and sermons in the tenth century. The *Capitula*, written by Theodulf of Orleans (c 821), is an example of an Anglo-Saxon book of instructions for priests. It was popular during the tenth and eleventh centuries. (Bloomfield 109).

Allegorical portrayals of the Seven Deadly Sins continue to appear throughout the Middle Ages, most notably in texts such as *Piers Plowman*, and according to Bloomfield, the Seven Deadly Sins became a popular topic following the dissemination of secular literature during the eleventh and twelfth centuries (109). Towards the end of the twelfth century, secular authors increasingly adopted the allegory of the Seven Deadly Sins, for example the *Sarum Prymer* and *Vices and Virtues*, and the sins continued to be used with frequency even into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Bloomfield 119). The Sins' appearance within vernacular literature reflects the centrality of this topic to medieval society. Manuals, such as the *Fasciculus Morum*, a handbook for preachers composed by a Franciscan friar in England shortly after 1300, which were also popular during the fourteenth century (Wenzel 1). The text was written as an aid for preaching and the *exempla* were organized according to the Seven Deadly Sins (Wenzel 2). The text is also linked to Chaucer's "Parson's Tale" (Wenzel, *Fasciculus Morum* 625). Such texts were a great influence on both Langland and Chaucer; Bloomfield notes that such sermons are associated with "type satire," of which the best example during the Middle Ages was *Piers Plowman* (165). What develops is a cultural and literary heritage rich with allegorical inference.

Both *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales* are framed around the allegorical pilgrimage. Such pilgrim's tales were, according to Julia Holloway, fictions, and, by association, the pilgrims were also held suspect (xiii). During the fourteenth century, pilgrims were portrayed as humble individuals who surrounded themselves with religious trappings (Holloway xiv). Holloway argues that Langland's and Chaucer's representations of pilgrims were exaggerated caricatures. Both Langland and Chaucer's works were impacted by the Black Death and created during an age when many believed that pilgrimage could ward off disease (Holloway xiv). Their works provide what Holloway calls "a mirror for pilgrims" and portray both true and false depictions, allowing readers to choose their own model pilgrim (xiv). Holloway notes the "lie" present in both Langland and Chaucer's characterization; these "lies" were allegorical, symbolic representations that placed a dilemma in the hands of the audience, who were left with the task of identifying the true nature of the "lies" or allegorical figures.

Through allegory and satire, the authors directed a critical eye to the pilgrims, the estates, and allowed their audience to make their own moral decisions.

The stock portrayals of figures of the Seven Deadly Sins flitter throughout the humorous pages of Chaucer in characters such as the willful Wife of Bath who, Tupper argues, represents the vice of Pride and the naughty Friar who, I argue, represents the vice of Lust. Langland introduced the Seven Deadly Sins in Passus V (B text). One by one, the sins are introduced and enact their own vices. For instance, in Passus V, Reason "bade Waster get to work . . . / [a]nd win back what he'd wasted with some kind of work while



Parnel Proud-Heart is told “to put away her robe’s embroidery/ And keep it in her closet in case she needed money” (Langland 24-27). Waster and Parnel obviously represent Sloth and Pride respectively. Langland’s other sins, such as Lechery and Envy, are more easily recognized. Chaucer’s narrative differs from Langland’s as his introduction of the sins is subtler. Unlike Langland, Chaucer does not blatantly name his pilgrims after their own vices. Chaucer named the figures according to their station rather than after their vices.

Medieval allegory was quite relevant to a Victorian reading public and is still an exciting avenue for critical examination to further our understanding not only of Medieval but Victorian literature. Exploring the literary tradition reveals many key authors who employed the Seven Deadly Sins allegorically. In addition to both Chaucer and Langland, Edmund Spenser uses the figures in *The Faerie Queen* featured in Book 1, Canto IV (Spenser 17-35). The sins are presented as counselors to Lucifera. Since the Seven Deadly Sins were a central element in the education of Christians in accordance with the penitential handbook tradition, Joan Heiges Blythe notes that many critics who read the Sins in a medieval context assert how fitting it is that the Sins emerge in Canto IV, which follows the spiritual growth of a knight as an example for mankind. In light of the “pilgrimage of the life of man” tradition, the Redcross Knight’s encounter with the sins can be viewed as the typical occurrence in each pilgrim’s passage to his objective (342). Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* is often linked to yet another work, a work key to the Victorian audience, Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. While there is no evidence to suggest

that Bunyan ever read *Piers Plowman*, there are many interesting parallels in the two works. Spenser's House of Holiness is much like Bunyan's House Beautiful, and Christian faces similar obstacles to those of the Redcross Knight (Spenser 216-217). Regardless of the theological message of the texts, it is clear that they follow in the literary pilgrimage tradition, which later impacts Victorian literature.

The similarities and use of allegory within Spenser and Bunyan as well as Langland and Chaucer argue for a definite allegorical tradition that continues throughout English literary history. Yet, it is primarily the Victorian reader with whom we are concerned. Barbara A. Johnson examines *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Piers Plowman*, noting the cultural transmissions of the text; Johnson states, "The historical connection between Langland's poem and Bunyan's narrative is not one of influence but of readership"(2). Johnson's study reveals what she terms the emergence of Protestant readership. She claims that "Protestant" readers emerged during the Middle Ages following the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 and completely realized in John Bunyan. She notes that the Protestant reader is distinguished by the distinct way that he/she reads a text, given he/she emerged in a time in which there was an appeal for the Scripture in English, and they are also characterized by their preference for religiously liberating texts (3). She remarks on Isaac D'Israeli's statement concerning *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Piers Plowman*, "How can we think of one without being reminded of the other?" (qtd. in Johnson 162). Johnson is reminding us that we must be aware of the lens that the reader brings to the text.

Even more critical is the importance of medieval literary history to the Victorian reader. Victorian periodicals reflected a recurring interest in Chaucer, Langland, Bunyan, Spenser and the allegorical tradition. In an “Index to the First Nineteen Volumes of the *Quarterly Review*,” lies a wealth of information that suggests the importance of this tradition. The index references an article on Langland who “satirized the religious votaries of his time” in volume three (Index 114). There are many articles throughout the volumes on Chaucer, who is deemed “the greatest poet produced by England” in an article in the first volume, and, in what seems a comparison to Langland, he appears in volume three as a poet who also “satirized the religious votaries of his time” (Index 48). Later in volume 11, one reads of Spenser’s and Milton’s high opinion of Chaucer (Index 48). There are almost as many articles on Spenser in the volumes as there are concerning Chaucer. Volume four contains an article that remarks on Spenser’s sanitizing of the priesthood, and Volume five features an article on his allegory (Index 182). Bunyan is also featured and his immortality as an author praised though his works attract fewer articles than either Chaucer or Spenser (Index 31). Like earlier writers of the tradition, such as Langland, Chaucer and Spenser, Bunyan “draws upon a trope that life is a journey, beset with trials, with a moral destination – which not only shaped Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, that crucial fictional prototype familiar to Victorian readers and writers alike, but was also to provide the organizing narrative framework for much of their [Victorian writers of religious fiction] own fiction” (Frasier 102). Many Victorian novelists, including George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, and Charles Dickens, adapted

religious ideas and emblems from Bunyan (Frasier 112). Reverend George Buirder rewrote Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in a metrical version in 1845, which is advertised in volume one in the December 1845 issue of the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* (1217). However, while Bunyan was important in influencing Victorian authors, it is Chaucer who features most prominently in articles of the early to mid nineteenth century. In the *Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* he was deemed "the father of the English Poets" (W.C.G. 9). Chaucer greatly impacted Victorian notions of Englishness. However, before one can examine the Victorian views on Chaucer and find parallels between his *Canterbury Tales* and Dickens's *David Copperfield*, one must carefully consider the medieval character of Chaucer's writings.

The pages of Chaucer's text reflect a cognizance of the problems of medieval society; this is evident in the anti-clerical nature of his text. It was a common literary theme by this time, and Chaucer's Monk is representative of such satirized characters (Mann 17). While Chaucer followed a literary tradition, during the fourteenth century pluralism and non-residency were a real problem within the church. Parish priests would often hold more than one office and reap the rewards, and papal schism further complicated the situation (McKisack 279). McKisack notes that a strong tide of nationalism encouraged pressure on powerful, land-owning monks to contribute tax monies to the crown; therefore, a negative attitude toward such wealthy autonomous clergy is understandable. The fourteenth century was a time of unrest, famine, plague (McKisack 329). Yet the rise of towns, the middle class, and guilds had diversified

society greatly, and while the growth of towns across England was hardly consistent, the crux of economic power fell into the hands of a number of wealthy guilds and individuals that aided the success of many towns (McKisack 382-383). The character of Chaucer's pilgrims was impacted by the tensions within medieval society.

As Helen Phillips notes in her *Introduction to the Canterbury Tales*, in their prologues many of the pilgrims give self-revealing speeches much like the speeches of personified sins found in *Piers Plowman* and those vice figures found in medieval morality drama (150). In *Plowman* B text Passus V, Envy claims, "I've a neighbor dwelling next door, I've done him harm often/ And blamed him behind his back to blacken his name./ And lied to lords about him to make him lose money,/ And turned his friends into his foes with my false tongue" ( 93-97). Similarly, Chaucer's characterization of his pilgrims reveals his distaste for those who would misuse the power and privileges granted to them by wealth, privilege, and station. Jill Mann notes that Chaucer's portraits both "expound on their [the representative of the estate] duties or criticize their failings" (3). Chaucer also notes the threat that these individuals present to society at large (Phillips 150).

Chaucer's medieval audience would have been alert to allegorical inferences. Miller notes that Chaucer's pilgrims are also "allegorically conceived abstracts of their time" (344). These characters relate to allegorical figures standardized by dramatic and clerical narratives (345). The audience comes to the work with certain preconceived ideas, certain programming. Miller notes that one principle that controls allegory

involves how the reader reads the figure. It is traditional for the medieval audience to perceive any figure as either *bono* or *malo*, positively or negatively (Miller 322). This value judgment is dependent on whether the implication of the figure is believed to be associated with a model whose existence is directed by charity, or an evil one administered by cupidity, as evident in Chaucer's characterization of the "solempne" Friar who is familiar with "dalliance" (322). The value judgment here is clearly negative. Chaucer's irony aids in the construction of the allegorical figure that Holloway claims the audience must discover. Maureen Quilligan notes, "Medieval rhetoric books define irony as a species of allegory . . . irony sets up a complicated relationship between reader and narrator" (132). She notes that the audience must adjust their understanding to become in tune with the author's meaning (132). In this light, irony is a facet of allegory.

Miller's work considers the allegorical nature of the tales told by each of the Canterbury pilgrims. He also notes the considerable effort on the part of Fredrick Tupper to establish a pattern in the *Canterbury Tales* centering on the trope of the Seven Deadly Sins. Miller, though claiming to be objective, convinces his reader that the tales told by the pilgrims are in fact, as Tupper suggested, related to traditional medieval allegory, and, in some way are an extension of their allegorical teller (Miller 474). Tupper argues that even readers unfamiliar with the trope of the Sins cannot fail to notice the various references that Chaucer makes to each and every one of these vice figures throughout the *Canterbury Tales* (96). Tupper remarks that Chaucer briefly mentions the "sinnes seven" in "The Merchant's Tale", Envy in "The Physician's Tale", Pride in the "Second Nun's

Tale”, Gluttony in “The Man of Law’s Tale”, and an exchange concerning Wrath, Avarice, and Idleness in the “Tale of Melibeus” (96). Tupper then offers the theory that the *Canterbury Tales* provides an “organic” use of the Sins, and he suggests that Chaucer utilizes the theological framework that they provide in his other tales (96). Other scholars did not concur with Tupper’s findings, notably John Livingston Lowes in his own article entitled “Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins.” Lowes argues that Tupper’s clear cut use of the sins is far too simplistic, and while Chaucer did indeed include the Seven Deadly Sins in the Tales, he did not use them as a “formal schematizing of the Seven Deadly Sins in the *Canterbury Tales*” (367-368).

During the early twentieth century, Tupper’s theory was highly criticized. Lowes infers that there is no direct relation to the sins as they are outlined in the “Parson’s Tale” and either the portraits in the “General Prologue” or the individual tales. However, Tupper’s thorough treatise makes a strong case for the allegorical use of the trope of the Seven Deadly Sins throughout the *Canterbury Tales*. Similarly, In *The Unity of the Canterbury Tales*, Ralph Baldwin acknowledges Lowes’ disregard for Tupper’s theory but argues that, “The Parson’s Tale” is not “told in complete dissociation with the rest. Each pilgrim and his story combine with the Parson’s homily” (101). Its validity is strengthened when one examines the literary tradition in which Chaucer was participating. As suggested by Bloomfield’s extensive work on the Seven Deadly Sins and Robertson’s own work, it would be logical for Chaucer to continue in this tradition (Robertson 367). Of the allegorical use of the Seven Deadly Sins, Wenzel claims that it

is clear that the model was more than a brief superficial movement within the current of medieval culture. The simple existence of the seven deadly sins in the works of Dante, Petrarch, Chaucer, and Langland “speaks for itself” (22). Tupper and Baldwin argue that the pilgrim’s portraits reflect those vice figures found in the allegorical tradition and that both the portraits and the tales are governed by a framework dictated by the “Parson’s Tale.” Lowes argues that the Vices are not as clear-cut as Tupper would lead one to believe; however, both Tupper and Baldwin note that the sins are far from clear-cut, and the authors acknowledge interconnectedness of the sins. It is essential that one understand the nature of the argument in order to understand the importance of establishing the impact of Chaucer’s allegory on the Victorian reader. It becomes clear, when examining the allegorical figures in the “General Prologue,” that the pilgrims’ characteristic vices lead to other related vices. The “branches” and the interconnected nature of the sins is a central characteristic of the “Parson’s Tale.” Therefore, as Tupper notes, the “Parson’s Tale” provides a formula with which we can decode the pilgrims in the “General Prologue.” If we consider an earlier critical audience, the Victorian scholar, perhaps these arguments in support of Chaucer’s use of allegory are still relevant.

It is not the aim of this thesis to focus in-depth upon the use of allegory within each of the pilgrim’s tales. Such a path would bring us far from our objective which is to analyze the way that the portraits of Chaucer’s pilgrims embody the Seven Deadly Sins as they are discussed in the “Parson’s Tale.” Chaucer, the narrator, is seemingly on a journey with other pilgrims. However, Chaucer the pilgrim, like his contemporary



reader, is faced with the rather arduous job of untangling the messages of his fellow pilgrims. He is given clues, through his own medieval knowledge, as to what sort of characters these folk really are. Tupper notes that Chaucer uses “the Deadly Seven as a framework in these narratives. With delightfully suggestive irony, he opposes practice to precept, rule of life to dogma, by making several of the story-tellers incarnate the very Sins they explicitly condemn” (107). The Pardoner is a prime example; he claims, “thus can I preche again that same vyce/ Which that I use, and that is avarice” (“The Pardoner’s Prologue 427-28).

In understanding Chaucer and allegory, one can gain new insight into the literary language used by the allegorist. According to Miller, the allegory of both the poet and preacher is controlled by “[t]he same habit of the mind,” and citing D.W. Robertson, he claims, “we can identify three interrelated activities which contribute to a unified ‘literary vocabulary.’ These are the analysis of what was called the Book of Nature, the exposition of the Scriptures, and the allegorization of the pagan classics” (329). This symbolism was essential in explaining scripture. Miller notes that a camel denoted humility, a sunrise alludes to enlightenment, and a fox is a sign of a hypocrite (329-330). Chaucer was known to have used physiognomy in the *Canterbury Tales*: the Wife of Bath’s gap teeth denote her rampant sexuality (Mann 125). According to Douglas Wurtele, it is evident given the wide dispersions of such manuals before, during, and after Chaucer’s time, that his audience would have been familiar with such cues; in fact, “there are nine known manuscripts dealing with physiognomy during Chaucer’s time, and Clyde Curry claims

that, among the pilgrims, the “gentlefolk” themselves are “doubtless well acquainted with the current physiognomical lore” (93 - 94). The tradition continued throughout the Renaissance, Graeme Tytler notes, through *Blason du Beau Tetin* (1531), echoing descriptive techniques used in medieval description of female beauty. However, Tytler considers the seventeenth century to be a key developmental period for literary portraits in the modern novel, citing the works of Joseph Hall’s *Characters* (1608) and the famous La Bruyère’s *Characteres* (1688) as two important texts that continue the tradition (Tytler 124-125). The belief in physiognomy connects both medieval and the Victorian understanding of characterization and is an important characteristic of the allegorical text.

Such clues were essential for both medieval and Victorian audiences in order for them to understand the significance of characterization within a work of literature. Athena Verettos notes that towards the end of the eighteenth century, physiognomy and phrenology were branches of scientific study, and they became quite popular during the early Victorian period (80). While the pseudoscientific theories were often regarded skeptically, they wielded a heavy influence upon nineteenth-century fiction. The two theories are based on the notion that one’s exterior features reflect internal traits of the mind, soul or character (Verettos 80). Johann Caspar Lavater’s *Fragmente* was key in renewing interests in physiognomy during the eighteenth century. According to Graeme Tytler, nineteenth-century culture was so inundated with physiognomy that the theory eventually impacted methods of characterization in the British novel (86). He claims that the author adopted “the hesitant, tentative approach of the physiognomist intent on

seeking out subtleties and nuances of facial expression” (Tytler 183). T. M. Parssinen notes that there was a call for a reliable manual on character due to the changes wrought by industrialization and urbanization, and physiognomy promised that one could derive an individual’s character by examining his facial features (7). Dickens’s Victorian audience was impacted by the popularity of Lavatar’s work as well as the medieval revival. The popularization of medieval works such as Chaucer’s and pseudo-medieval science would enable a Victorian audience to make further connections between a medieval text like Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Dickens’s *David Copperfield*.

The theory of humors, a Greek medical theory also popular during the Middle Ages, was used during the Victorian era to understand predisposition to diseases. These would have been essential in understanding the allegorical nature of the sins as they relate to medieval texts. The study of physiognomy also led to the popularity of phrenology, which spawned many learned societies as well as a scholarly journal entitled *Phrenological Journal and Miscellany* (Parssinen 7-8). Scholarly journals introduced the science to the middle class, and, by the mid-century, phrenologists spread the theory to the lower classes (12). During the nineteenth-century, Dickens’ Victorian audience was well aware of the purported significance of a character’s appearance. The pseudo-science of physiognomy was an important part of the Victorian cultural milieu. Dickens makes a blatant reference to physiognomy in *David Copperfield*; David notes of Aunt Betsy, “What my aunt saw, or did not see, I defy the science of physiognomy to have made out, without her own consent . . . [h]er face might have been a dead wall” (501).

The scene, while emphasizing her own disgust with Uriah's outlandish gestures, discusses her inability to be read through the science of physiognomy. In the same scene, she remarks that if Uriah were a man he should be able to control his own body and behave like a man, implying to the reader that his actions associate him with something other. Dickens also attests to the fact that he ascribes to the validity of the art of Physiognomy in an article he wrote in *All The Year Round*: "I hold phrenology, within certain limits, to be true; I am much of the same mind as to the subtler expressions of the hand; I hold physiognomy to be infallible; though all these sciences demand rare qualities in the student (Dickens 108). References to physiognomy can be found in Dickens's *Great Expectations* as well as several articles in both *Household Words* and *All The Year Round*, which featured an article entitled "Hand-Shaking" that is particularly revealing in light of Uriah Heep. It is Uriah Heep's reflection that is the current focal point of inspection (Dickens 171). Such details not only enriched the reading of a text but also provided cues to the readers concerning the characters that inhabited their fiction. These cues provided a powerful link between the fiction of their day and the romanticized medieval texts that the Victorian reader valued.

In an era where readers looked to the past and longed for a simpler age, and a time in which Chaucer represented "strains of an earlier time, which, if they have all the faults, have likewise all the graces of childhood--simplicity, sincerity, transparency, and joy" (Collette 118)-- it is possible that an audience longing for a simpler time may have valued Chaucer's allegory precisely for its simplicity. Gay Clifford claims there were

many critics of allegory during the Victorian era (117). However, Victorian periodicals are filled with praise of the allegory and those authors who perfected the art, particularly Chaucer: “Chaucer was master of the whole range of vernacular poetry . . . as well as the latter allegorical school,” and the author notes that “It is indeed extraordinary to see the whole of the mediaeval, or post-mediaeval poetry . . . summed up, as it were represented by Chaucer in one or more perfect examples” (*The Literary Gazette* 20). During the mid-nineteenth-century, Chaucer and his literary style were representative of all that was superbly English, and in understanding and embracing Chaucer, readers were not only embracing that simpler era but were also celebrating their own Englishness.

Quite a few scholars have devoted studies to unearthing the presence of allegory and the allegorical use of the Seven Deadly Sins within Dickens’s work. In *Allegory in Dickens*, Jane Vogel provides an extensive examination of the form. In chapter three, she takes a look at the significance of naming, e.g., of Murdstone in *David Copperfield*, as Murdstone denotes murder or unnatural death, particularly that of David’s mother (43). Vogel’s reading of Dickens’s novels focuses on biblical allegory; however, her study identifies the omnipresent nature of allegorical symbolism within his works. Vogel relates biblical figures and parables to the life of David, citing David and Goliath. She even likens David to a ‘Canterbury pilgrim’ (127). Dickens’s ritual naming parallels the allegorical “habit of mind” in Chaucer of which Miller writes. Dickens’s clues provided a language for his readers to follow and establish a system of understanding the subtext

of his novels, which encouraged his reader to make those connections between Dickens's and Chaucer's texts.

Dickens's own religious beliefs figure prominently in Theresa R. Love's *Dickens and the Seven Deadly Sins*. Love, like other critics, notes that in his novels, Dickens links social and personal failings to one or more of the Seven Deadly Sins. However, Love asserts that Dickens utilizes the framework in order to reveal that the social and political ills that bombard Victorian England are a direct result of the submission to those Sins, and she asserts that Dickens's message suggests that the failures of the era may be repaired if individuals would amend their ways and replace these vices with a Christian brotherly love (xix-xx). Love's interpretation of Dickens's text as a moralizing rallying cry is accepted in Susan Thurin's research on Dickens and the Seven Deadly Sins, which details Dickens's use of allegory in *Great Expectations*. Like Vogel, she notes the significance of the number seven as well as the association of Pip with Everyman (thoroughly explored in Dorothy Van Ghent's *The English Novel*). More importantly, Thurin remarks that allegory is found not only in superficial elements or even the similar formal patterns within that of the *Buildungsroman*, but also in a rather old form of allegory involving the Seven Deadly Sins.

All of these characters have some affinity to Pip or influence his life in some way, but the intensity and significance of their effect on him varies. From several he consciously learns a moral lesson by being a victim of the sin represented by the character, absorbing it into his own behavior, and

finally repudiating it. Other symbolic characters epitomizing frailty serve as foils for Pip's actions or provide him with opportunities for a virtuous response to their deadly sins. (202)

Similarly, I concur with Thurin in asserting that the allegory employed within *David Copperfield* was perhaps not intended to portray the characters that David meets as physical representations of the Seven Deadly Sins, but that they are representations based on a literary tradition, particularly the pilgrimage or path that *Everyman* takes in which the figure faces moral hurdles that threaten his well-being; these figures, which represent the Seven Deadly Sins, represent obstructions to the character's moral growth. This notion is hardly novel; however, in Chapter Three I intend to relate Dickens's further purpose to that of Chaucer. Thurin asserts that Dickens was less concerned with the spiritual welfare of his fellow man's soul than with the immediate and social implications that awareness and a rejection of the Seven Deadly Sins would provide (215). i.e., if one turned away from these sins, he would be more aware of the needs of his fellow man than of his own selfish desires. Dickens's use of the Seven Deadly Sins was, in fact, a form of social critique.

Yet the link between Chaucer and Dickens's use of the allegorical mode is open to question. For all of Love's meticulous study on Dickens's allegorical use of the Seven Deadly Sins, the foreword of her book attempts to deny the validity of a true connection between the two. Lucien Fournier suggests that

it is admittedly difficult to substantiate that Dickens falls within a religious and literary tradition so far apart from that of his own age, although the nineteenth century did experience a revival in gothic architecture and although Dickens's strongest moral mentor, Carlyle, did, in his *Past and Present*, proclaim a quasi-affinity with medievalism. All attempts to establish clearly traceable links are merely tenuous, and the arguments for them can be supported only by suggested similarities. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to indicate parallels if only to broaden our awareness of the possible range of Dickens's thought and technique. (qtd. in Love viii)

I argue in contrast, that *David Copperfield* reflects the influence of Chaucer within Dickens's text and, perhaps, illustrates Dickens's affinity with medievalism.

Chaucer and Dickens utilized allegory in order to draw the reader into a multi-layered text. Dickens faced specific concerns that accompanied the publication of such a lengthy work published in monthly installments. By using allegorical "type-figures," Dickens was aiding his reader in the understanding of each character, and he was also providing a key that facilitated the ability to remember the distinct figures during the lengthy read. For instance, the wrathful Mr. Murdstone, a seemingly respectable man, is quite memorable, as his name is similar to the word "murder," and, though he does not literally murder anyone, his wrathful treatment of David's mother eventually drives her to an early grave. His name makes him memorable, and it also forecasts events that will transpire later in the novel. I argue that Chaucer capitalized on this use of allegory,



which aided his readers in distinguishing the type of figures along this pilgrimage. Chaucer presents us with an ironic portrait of a Friar, “a ful solempne man” (209). Yet the reader gathers from other inferences that all is not as it seems. This friar knows, “[s]o muchel of dalliance and fair language” (211). He is the embodiment of Lust. It is reasonable to assume that Dickens and his Victorian fellows would have noted these type figures as well, given that the medieval revival peaked during the early to mid-nineteenth-century. While Dickens and Chaucer write in different media to vastly different audiences, what remains constant is the use of allegory. While we cannot assume that the audiences derived similar inferences through the author’s use of allegory, we do know that Chaucer’s audience was familiar with the use of allegory, and evidence suggests that Dickens’s audience, familiar with the *Pilgrim’s Progress* and fascinated by medieval culture and literature via the Medieval Revival burgeoning in contemporary periodicals and art, was also familiar with Chaucer’s use of allegory.

More important is the issue of Dickens’s own familiarity with Chaucer’s work. In his novel *David Copperfield*, Dickens makes several nods to Chaucer’s work. After all, David’s schooling took place in Canterbury. Mr. Micawber’s comments infuse these references with greater significance. In Chapter 27, he asks David for an account of his acquaintances, “And how is our good friend the Doctor . . . and all the circle at Canterbury?” (396). He later adds, “It was at Canterbury where we last met. Within the shadow, I may figuratively say, of that religious edifice, immortalized by Chaucer, which was anciently the resort of Pilgrims from the remotest corners of – in short . . . in the

immediate neighborhood of the Cathedral” (396). Later in the novel Mr. Micawber, who has been investigating the nefarious deeds of Uriah Heep, states, “For myself, My Canterbury Pilgrimage has done much; imprisonment on civil process, and want, will soon do more” (738). Dickens’s allusions to the *Canterbury Tales* imbue David’s journey with a symbolic significance and encourage the reader to look deeper into the text. Undoubtedly, the references to Canterbury would have evoked connotations of Chaucer’s tale to the Victorian Reader.

Charlotte C. Morse explores the popularity of Chaucer during the nineteenth-century in her work *Popularizing Chaucer in the Nineteenth Century*. For example, during the early nineteenth century, Cowden Clark published a modernized version of the *Canterbury Tales* in hopes of reaching middle and lower class readers (Morse 104). Charles Knight was also interested in stimulating the minds of the lower classes. Dickens was fully aware of these efforts to popularize the works of authors that were traditionally read only by those who could afford an education (Morse 104). However, in a letter to Knight, Dickens remarks, “[b]e content if in their wretched intervals of leisure they read for amusement . . . They [the working class] are born at the oar, and they live and die at it. Good God, what would we have of them!” (qtd. in Morse 104). Dickens felt a great sympathy for the struggling masses, and yet his attitude towards the distribution of Chaucer to the poor does not suggest that he thought the material or reader unfit. Rather, it suggests that he realized that a working class reader was physically burdened and literature should provide him with a moment of leisure. Unlike the learned middle class

audience, who would have familiarized themselves with medieval literature and tropes by reading contemporary journals, a working class audience lacked both the time and the funds to acquaint itself with such an extensive literary tradition. In contrast, *David Copperfield* speaks to a wide audience. While allowing a well-read middle class, familiar with literary tradition, to draw connections with earlier literary works, the novel also provides a lower class audience with entertainment and perhaps, unlike Chaucer, Dickens's works could impact the minds of readers through a more familiar medium than a medieval text, even when translated. While Dickens's learned audience may have grasped the literary nuances of the text, a working class audience would be amused by the narrative and perhaps subtly moved by a seemingly latent moral message. Dickens's use of allegory suggests that he thoroughly grasped Chaucer's own intent, which Jill Mann describes as "a satiric representation of all classes of society" (1). It is easy to understand why, with his witty sensibility, Dickens would have been influenced by Chaucer's work. Barry Qualls views "the double focuses of their [Victorian novelist's] sacred/secular scripture as its defining characteristic, and attributes the Victorians' need to underwrite their secular narratives of modern life with the emblems, parables, and plots of religious tradition to the very erosion of religious certainties in mid-nineteenth century Britain" (qtd. in Frasier 112). Additionally, I would argue that Dickens's intent was to ridicule the sins of those Victorian estates with the hope of changing society.

Dickens's society, Victorian England, while vastly different from Chaucer's England, was facing many changes. As of 1830 when the first passenger train traveled

between Liverpool and Manchester, their world had become significantly smaller. Such startling technological changes and an increasingly faster moving world caused many to long for simpler times and medieval Christian devotion (Davies 760). The medieval traditions of allegory thus supplied ready-made tools for Dickens's talents.

Technological advancements such as the railroad and a vastly growing reading public are merely a few changes that faced Victorian Britain. Further explanation of the culture and of the reading public, while fascinating, has been well documented. However, it seems relevant to note here that works of both Chaucer and Dickens reflect an awareness of the changing nature of their era and an interest in the plight of human kind.

Dickens's fiction, unlike Chaucer's, while aimed at an audience composed of the mass of the middle-class reading public, also displays his aversion for the privileged elite, privilege assumed through birthright. *David Copperfield* further showcases Dickens's distaste for the haughty assumptions of the privileged set represented by Steerforth, who clearly abuses his position by taking advantage of little Emily, and Mr. Wickfield, who grossly mismanages his business affairs.

Velma Bourgeois Richmond notes that the medieval revival was an attempt to glorify the past in an effort to encourage Victorians to return to a simpler life free from the corruption of the modern world. (Richmond 9-11). Many Englishmen such as Pugin, Carlyle, Ruskin, and the members of the Young England and Pre-Raphaelite movements ascribed to the medieval revival, and looked and back to a simpler time. Many held utopian views of a classless society but believed that in order to create "such a spirit of

community” Victorians had to overcome “the flagrant disregard of capitalists for the workers of the nation and the selfish motives of the newly rich who had no sense of obligation or duty as attendant on the possession of wealth” (Collette 5-6). While there is no evidence to suggest that Dickens felt any bond with the members of Young England, his reform motives were similar to theirs. While he may not have desired a classless society, his novel, *David Copperfield*, seems to suggest that he believed the classes were in need of moral guidance.

Popularizing Chaucer became a way to influence the perceptions of the nineteenth-century reader, and though Dickens did not subscribe to the medieval revival, it would be erroneous for critics to link his distaste for a social movement with his own feelings towards the literature of the medieval era. In fact, in a letter to Sir James Emmerson Tennent on August 20, 1866, Dickens cited a goodly portion of “The Pardoner’s Tale” (which provides a lengthy diatribe on Avarice and Gluttony) (266). According to F.T. Flahiff, comparing the texts suggests that Dickens cited these lines from memory (266). He would hardly have committed to memory a text that he believed to be quaint and outdated. Evidence suggests that Dickens was quite familiar with Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and textual evidence in *David Copperfield*, which will be covered later, suggests further connections between the texts. However, one must consider both the author and the reader’s perceptions. Regardless of Dickens’s own intentions, the general medieval influence in the era suggests that readers would draw

connections between Dickens's text and Chaucer's merely by setting *David Copperfield* in Canterbury.

In addition, during the mid-nineteenth century, Chaucer is referenced in Dickens's periodical *All The Year Round*. An article "The Sign of Five Centuries," is an eloquently written piece that focuses on the Tabard Inn of Southwark which features so prominently in Chaucer. The author's purpose is to rally others to the cause of saving this historic building from being torn down. The author notes that "it was here that Mr. Pickwick first made the acquaintance of Mr. Samuel Weller" (118). This deliberate allusion to Dickens's work amidst other pointed instances in which Shakespeare and Chaucer have used the historic cite in their own work suggests that Dickens may have either written the piece or had a heavy hand in editing. Either way, Dickens would have been familiar with the piece and its lengthy discussion of Chaucer's pilgrims.

Most notable in the article are the detailed discussions of many of the Pilgrims, of whom the author notes, "it is probable enough that at least some of his characters are life-portraits . . . But, even if they are pure inventions, they have been clad by the genius of the poet with that mysterious vitality which is more enduring than the mere life of flesh and blood" ("The Sign of Five Centuries" 118). Dickens and his audience were familiar with the figures within the tales of Chaucer, and while Chaucer wrote five hundred years before their time, Chaucer's characters were still, for example, considered "[t]he tradesmen who kept shop along the High-street then, much as they keep it now" (119). Countless other references were made to Chaucer in *All The Year Round* including

“Which is Which,” “Poetry of Fact,” “Thoroughly English,” and “Walpurgis Night” and “May Day” and in *Household Words*, such as “Petition Extraordinary” and “About Some Allegorical Books.” While the subjects of these articles range from a discussion on poetics and language to May Day, it is clear that Victorians were interested in both reading and writing about Chaucer.

While articles about Chaucer appear throughout Dickens’s periodical, there are also many advertisements for editions of Chaucer’s works or volumes that included them (Advertisement 3, 5). While Chaucer presented a popular topic, the Seven Deadly Sins are discussed in articles in *All The Year Round*, including “A Small Star in the West” and “Number Seven, Brown’s Lane”: both articles discuss the Sins in terms of Bunyan’s allegory, making many allusions to his text. Dickens also references the Deadly Sins in his work *Hard Times* (429). In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Norman Page notes that “there is a striking reference to Nell’s intimate familiarity with the work [Pilgrim’s Progress] in Chapter 15” ( xxiv). A later discussion of Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins entitled “The Old Poets On the Seven Deadly Sins” appeared in *Cornhill* in 1866. The author, H. Simpson, notes that “Chaucer, who in his *Canterbury Tales* has left us a living and moving picture of his time . . . has included miracle plays . . . moralities, however, which were entirely allegorical . . . and they oftentimes display powers of satire worthy of Pope or Churchill” (Simpson 624). The author notes a rich use of satire, and claims that

it is not to be supposed that our old allegorist would overlook the seven deadly sins in choosing subjects for their moralizings. They would be

continually hearing about them from the pulpit; they would see them sculpted in the cathedrals and churches; their libraries would contain richly-illuminated manuscripts, in which the deadly sins would be the subject of both pen and pencil; and they would also meet with them in the popular spectacles – the mysteries, moralities, pageants, revels or masques. (625)

While published after Dickens's *David Copperfield*, the text illustrates the current of discussion within periodicals during the nineteenth-century to which his readers would have been exposed. The lengthy and detailed article illuminates the Victorian perception of the medieval period and the familiarity of the Victorian public with medieval authors. When taken into account with those articles that were featured in Dickens's and other Victorian periodicals, the presence of these articles suggest that a broad audience was both interested in and familiar with Chaucer and such references to allegory and appreciated Chaucer's use of allegory. In "The Old Poets On the Seven Deadly Sins," Simpson discusses the Seven Deadly Sins as they are employed allegorically by Chaucer, Spenser, and even in *Piers Plowman*. The author remarks that, "[t]he beasts which Spenser has associated with the different vices are those which the common estimation of the characteristics of the various animal would lead us to look for" (630). Such-off handed comments once again suggest what Miller alludes to as a "habit of the mind."

Perhaps this "habit of the mind" was fostered throughout English literary history and acts as a sort of standard lexicon for the Victorian audience to draw upon, a set of



literary archetypes, via Bunyan and Victorian periodicals. While it cannot be assumed that all audiences, illiterate and literate, were familiar with these cues, it is possible that such knowledge developed to understand allegory and continued to be passed along. As Simpson noted, the predominantly illiterate medieval audience was continually bombarded by visual and oral information that reinforced these ideas. A Victorian audience would be familiar with visual representations of the sins as well as biblical inferences. If however between the five hundred years that Chaucer was writing and the nineteenth-century this knowledge was lost by the illiterate middle and lower classes, the augmented effort to educate and stimulate an increasingly literate populace would have reestablished many of these inferences (Simpson 630). Lavatar's pamphlet on physiognomy and the increasing public interest in such subjects suggest that the Victorian public would be aware of the symbolic significances present in literature. What remains is an exploration of Dickens's text. *David Copperfield* presents a unique opportunity for the reader to examine the pilgrimage captured by the imaginative literary genius of Charles Dickens, and the novel is a further step in addressing Wenzel's query, "A final question of interest for the history of the Seven Deadly Sins is their fate after the Middle Ages" (21).

## Chapter II

### The Seven Deadly Sins in *The Canterbury Tales* and *David Copperfield*

*Coming into Canterbury, I loitered through the old streets with a sober pleasure that calmed my spirits, and eased my heart. There were the old signs, the old names over the shops, the old people serving in them. It appeared so long, since I had been a schoolboy there, that I wondered the place was so little changed, until I reflected how little I was changed myself. (Dickens, David Copperfield 547)*

Many Victorian readers were familiar with Geoffrey Chaucer's works; a compilation of earlier articles by various authors appeared in the *North British Review* in 1849. One article "The Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer" appears along with a memoir by Sir Harris Nicholas. It asks,

[d]o the sayings and doings of Chaucer thus fall beyond the pale of general interest; does his image thus shrink into the shadowy past?

Nothing can be more erroneous than such a supposition, and indeed, so far is his story from being strange and distant to us, that we believe everyone who investigates it for the first time we feel astonished it should have been possible for anyone . . . to lead a life in all respects so nearly resembling that of an accomplished and successful civilian at the present day. ("The Poetical Works" 291)

More than any other author within English literary tradition, Chaucer and his use of allegory hold significance for the Victorian reader and, as I will argue here, in part for Dickens's *David Copperfield*. The links between the *Canterbury Tales* and *David*

*Copperfield* are clarified when the texts are closely compared. While the modern reader might overlook the use of Canterbury as a setting, a nineteenth-century audience would naturally have associated Canterbury with Chaucer's iconic tale. Dickens's letter to Sir James Emerson Tennant, in which he quotes a section of the "Pardoner's Tale" from memory, speaks to his own familiarity both with Chaucer and the "Pardoner's Tale," which focuses on several of the Seven Deadly Sins.

One connection between Chaucer's and Dickens's use of allegory can be seen in the form and function of Dickens's characters. In *Aspects of the Novel*, E.M. Forster describes Dickens's use and success with "'flat characters' figures defined by one or two exaggerated traits" (qtd. in Davis 490), and Paul Davis notes that [e]xcept for David Copperfield and Pip, these flat characters are said to lack an internal life and remain unchanged by the experiences they go through" (490). The avaricious Mr. Barkis is perhaps a prime example of such a flat stagnant character; throughout his life, he hoards his wealth carrying it with him. Even in death he would be near his worldly possessions. Dickens's use of what critics term "types" harkens back to early literary influences; this quality is logical in light of allegory's association with one-dimensional characters as types. Angus Fletcher, author of *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, asserts that,

Personified abstractions are probably the most obviously allegorical agents, whether virtues and vices in a *psychomachia* or chivalric ideals in a medieval romance or magic agencies in a romantic epic. Whatever area the abstract ideas come from, these agents give a sort of life to intellectual

conceptions; they may not actually create a personality before our eyes,  
but they do create a semblance of personality. (26-27)

It seems rational to consider that Dickens writing during the mid nineteenth century and being well versed in literary tradition is likely to have noticed Chaucer's use of allegory; in fact, Dickens may have been inspired by Chaucer's own witty use of the trope.

However, many fail to realize that Dickens's type figures are allegorical. E.D.H. Johnson reads Dickens's figures as circular characters who are rarely altered by their encounters. The continuation of the plot merely illustrates the inert nature of the character (119). Johnson is not alone in his estimation. Of Dickens's villains, Irving W. Kreutz claims, "they prove in their erring to be merely inhuman; there is very little room in them for reformation" (331). Included in this group are Steerforth and Uriah Heep because neither is reformed. Steerforth sets out to sea and seems to wander in search of salvation only to die at sea, and Uriah Heep's feigned reformation is quite obvious. Yet it is not a lack of humanity that truly defines them but an allegorical type. Critics who note the dearth of dimension within the characters of Dickens's novels are seeing the author's creative use of allegory. Consider, for example, this passage from Carter's "Character Books":

Chaucer intended the pilgrims at the Tabard to be types, rather than individual portraiture . . . . The progress of science and the arts has changed the character of these objects that surround the human race but the new objects excite the same ideas as their precursors . . . the

immutability of human nature is one that the character books are well calculated to impress. They bring before us the great enemies of our kind, the world, the flesh, and the devil, thinly disguised in the garments and the words of a former generation, but working the same works that we may daily see around us. (470- 471)

Carter suggests that throughout the ages literature has captured the essence of character, which is immutable throughout time. While this may be hard for the modern reader to accept, it is yet another link that ties the Victorian reader to a glorified past. Carter's article illustrates that Victorian critics were instructing Victorian readers to identify Chaucer's characters as types, and the Victorian reader was instructed to read characters, devils "working the same works" around them daily. The Victorian readership was searching for these figures in their daily activities, which more often than not included the reading of periodicals and novels. They were searching for the hidden, underlying meaning and motive of these figures, allegory, and this was prompted by the influx of medieval literature in the Victorian periodical. Chaucer, to the mid nineteenth-century reader, has the ability to connect past and present, as his medieval use of allegory impacted their own reading of Victorian literature. Collette notes, "Chaucer, distant in time, was yet organically connected to the nineteenth-century, and to the nineteenth-century common man" (117). Chaucer's "poetry is that of reality" (Lorimer, "Poetical Works of Chaucer," *North British Review* 326).

In order to illuminate the link between the allegorical use of the Seven Deadly Sins by both Chaucer and Dickens, this chapter will provide an analysis of both Chaucer's and Dickens's application of the Gregorian order. The Gregorian order,– Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust– established by Gregory the Great during the seventh century, provides a useful schema for analyzing the linked sins (Bloomfield 71). Pride seems a natural place for the journey to begin. The sin of pride evokes connections with the rebellion of Lucifer. Bloomfield notes that Pride is a lion and the head of all vices. Envy, the venomous serpent, is next, followed by wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony and Lust (Bloomfield 183). Siegfried Wenzel's scholarship provides several alternative models that were also used to connect the sins to one another. The "cosmological model" he references is based on the writings of Robert Grosseteste, who served as Bishop of Lincoln from 1235 to 1253 (Wenzel 8). His model provides interesting insight into the link between the humors and the Seven Deadly Sins, as he connects each sin with the elements. For example he cites the *Quoniam ut ait sapiens* which claims that "[g]reed [arises according to the nature of the earth] because like the earth it is cold and dry; therefore, old men, in whom heat and humidity are lacking, are exceedingly greedy" (Wenzel 8).

However, it is important to note the interconnectedness of the sins before we begin; each sin was believed to be intertwined with the previous sin like the roots of a tree, and "pride is the root of all sins" (Bloomfield 72 –73). The first five sins were believed to be spiritual and the last were two carnal sins; the progression of the sins that

Gregory the Great established illustrated the interrelatedness of the sins (Bloomfield 73). Chaucer's pilgrims, while representative of a particular sin, illustrate the way that one sin branches off into another. The sins are never represented in pure form; they are elements that lead to other sins. "The Parson's Tale" illustrates this quality, "Of the roote of these sevene synnes, thane, is Pride the general roote of alle harmes. For of this roote spyrngen certain branches, as Ire, Envye, Accidie or Slewthe, Avarice or Coveitise . . ., Glotonye, and Lecherye" (388). Later the Parson notes:

whoso hath envye upon his neighebor, anon he wole comunly fynde hym  
a matere of wratthe, in word or in dede, agayns hym to whom he hath  
envye./ And as wel cometh Ire of Pride as of Envye, for soothly  
he that is poud or envious is lightly wroth  
  
("The Parson's Tale" 533-534)

Chaucer does not construct a pure portrait of each sin; however, the fact that he does not construct pure portraits follows medieval tradition, the notion that the Seven Deadly Sins are interconnected and lead to other sins. This multifaceted nature of the sins is also reflected in John Gower's *Mirroure de l'Omme* in which Death and Sin marry and produce the Seven Deadly Sins, who later marry the world. This polygamous marriage produces thirty-five offspring or branches. Each sin produces five children, and the sins and their children succeed in their temptation of man (Bloomfield 194-195).

Each of Chaucer's characters represent a compounded portrait of sins; such multifaceted portraits can be seen in Dickens's characters as well. These will be detailed

in Chapter II. The interconnected nature of the sins illuminates and somewhat complicates portraits like that of the Wife of Bath, who is linked to both the sin of Pride and Lust. While her actions and behavior suggest connections to the “Parson’s Tale” and the Parson’s speech on Pride, which will be discussed later in this chapter, the pleasure that she takes in the marriage bed along with her gaped teeth suggest that she is a lusty and lascivious woman (Wurtele 104). Emerging within Dickens’s *David Copperfield* are distinct types that echo a tradition long before his own, the Seven Deadly Sins. The pageant of Sins can be seen wending its way throughout Dickens’s *David Copperfield*. The portrait of Uriah presents a figure whose pride also leads to his envy of the Wickfields. Theresa Love notes that in *David Copperfield*, the emphasis is on Steerforth’s pride; his lust is but an outgrowth of this mortal sin. Rosa Dartle’s pride results in her envy of Little Emily and eventually leads her to spite and anger” (Love xxv). As is suggested by Vogel, Love, Thurin and others, Dickens’s works are filled with characters that readily fall under the rubrics of the seven deadly sins. It remains to compare the texts of both Chaucer and Dickens and discover the nature of those pilgrims that David meets upon his journey.



## CHAUCER

### PRIDE

As has been stated, Chaucer's "Parson's Tale" provides an interesting reflection on the sins that appear in the "General Prologue." However, there has been significant scholarship on the origin of Chaucer's "Parson's Tale." The traditional view holds that the "Parson's Tale" uses information from St. Raymund of Pennaforte's *Summa casuum* (1222/29) and friar William Peraldus's *Summa vitiorum* (1236) (Benson 956). Many, including Wenzel in "The Source of Chaucer's Seven Deadly Sins" agree that Chaucer used other sources for his "Parson's Tale." Also, in "The Source for the 'Remedia' of the Parson's Tale," Wenzel notes alternate sources including the sources of the "remedies" for the sins (Wenzel 433). However, most scholars including Wenzel, Patterson, and Lawler agree that the "Parson's Tale" was written by Chaucer (Bestul 606).

On the sin of Pride, the "Parson's Tale" distinguishes between two types of pride: that which is hidden within a man's heart and that which is blatantly flaunted in his appearance(409). The latter is of course a sign of the former. The hidden pride of the heart becomes evident in wicked speech, and Pride, the Parson reveals, is expressed through the individual's disobedience to God's commandments, boastfulness about the evil or good deeds that one has done, duplicitous behavior that conceals perverseness under a guise of goodness, malicious behavior in the form of one's disdain for fellow man, pride of belief in one's own righteous character and lack of disgrace regarding the

wrongs one has committed (389-394). Proud individuals are impertinent in denying judgments passed on them by others and in their refusal to yield to a master or acknowledge an equal. They are also persistent in their opposition to every authority (394 -399). The proud person shows irreverence in denying honor to those who deserve it, persistence in defending foolish behavior and overconfidence in intellect, and persistent speeches which laud his or her achievements (399-402). The “Parson’s Tale” provides a description of the sin of Pride that enables the reader to identify the vice figure of Pride, the Wife of Bath, who appears within the “General Prologue.”

Such prideful behavior is reflected in the in character of the Wife of Bath, who dresses ostentatiously and refuses to accept the rule of her husband or society. She calls herself a “noble prechor” and claims of her first husband, “I chided hem spitously” (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” 107-108). The noble wife, through her own pride, reveals that she is hardly fit to “glose,” and she reveals that she is unruly, using both her body and tongue to gain mastery over her husbands. Tupper argues that the Wife of Bath, though a complex character, is, foremost, prideful (108). Baldwin also notes that the wife is prideful, “inobedient, and ‘likerous,’ a prattler and a scold. All these traits are castigated by the Parson” (Baldwin 102). Her dialogue resembles that of a monk’s sermon, and she utilizes the format to establish her authority, claiming that she, because of her own experience, has the right to speak on marriage. Yet her actions clearly reveal her own prideful and perverse nature.

Physiognomy and the medieval theory on bodily humors becomes yet another element with which to identify temperament in an allegory. The Wife of Bath's red complexion is associated with being "sanguine," which can either denote an honest or angry man, and her gap teeth indicate that she is "amorous, bold, false, gluttonous, and lascivious" (Wurtele 104). The Wife of Bath, a cloth maker, has a rather overblown sense of her own position,

In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon

That to the offryng before hire shoulde goon;

And if ther dide, certeyn so wroth was she,

That she was out of all charitee. ("General Prologue" 449-452)

Jill Mann notes the Wife's "concern for precedence in making the offering [which] is a trait described in the Parson's Tale as an example of Pride . . . a vice regularly associated with women" (122). While I will later make a case for the Monk as representative of Sloth later, Baldwin claims that the Monk is also representative of Pride. Particularly, he discusses the Monk's horses and equestrian tackle (102). Chaucer notes that the Monk owned "[f]ul many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable,/And whan he rood, men myghte his brydel here" ("General Prologue" 168-169). Baldwin notes the Parson's discussion of such finery in his discussion of Pride:

the delicate horses that been holden for delite, that been so faire, fatte, and costlewe;/ and also in e synne of aornement or of apparaille is in thynges that appertenen to ridyng, . . . and in to curious harneys, as in sadeles, in

croupers, peytrels, and brideles covered with precious clothing, and riche  
barres and plates of gold and of silver.”

(“The Parson’s Tale” 432-433).

## ENVY

Envy, Chaucer’s Parson tells us, finds delight in the harm that others face; it also finds pleasure in spiteful speech, and disparages the goodness of other (“The Parson’s Tale” 491-494). In “The Parson’s Tale,” Envy spawns hatred and finds expression through evil deeds that are committed upon one’s neighbor; Envy is “bitterness of herte . . . scornynge of his neighbor . . . malignitee, thurgh which a man annoyeth his neighbor prively . . . brennen his hous pryvely,/ or empoysone or sleen his beestes” (“Parson’s Tale” 510-514). Envy, as does pride, finds expression through speech as well as evil deeds. It breeds hatred and Anger. Baldwin clames that “[t]he Reeve and the Miller, and the Friar and the Summoner are the quarrelsome pairs” (103). He cites the Parson’s comment on Envy, “thane stant Envye, and holdeth the hoote iren upon the hearte of man” (“The Parson’s Tale” 556). Their Envy also links them with the sin of Wrath, as will be discussed later.

Tupper claims that Chaucer’s Man of Law represents Envy (110). The Man of Law makes his living by precipitating the downfall of others. Chaucer notes, “his wordes weren so wise/ . . . So greet a purchasour was nowhere noon” (313-318). The Man of Law aspires to be above his own essentially clerical class. As a “purchasour” he is buying up lands upon which he may reap financial benefits and possibly molest renters,

and his abundant robes suggest that he is a corrupt man, taking bribes and special payments of robes (Mann 89). His envy of those with wealth encourages him to aid others in falsely defaming their own neighbors and sitting in judgment over his fellow man; “in his own life, we are led to suspect, he is perhaps neither so dignified nor so moral as he would like to appear” (Alfred 221). In short, it seems that our Lawyer misuses the law that he was instructed to uphold. He clothes himself with the law and knows it well, but Chaucer seems to suggest that his actions are hardly those of an upright man.

Chaucer focuses on the Man of Law’s professional skills, seemingly praising him for his abilities while noting his devious behavior (Mann 86). Chaucer praises the great “purchasor,” and the Man of Law seems to be a man who excels at his job. Mann notes that “buyer of land” was a common stereotype for a lawyer; however, rather than blatantly attack the figure, Chaucer suggests his corruption by such as the gifts of ‘fees and robes’ (89-90):

“Discreet he was and of greet reverence-  
He semed swich, his wordes weren so wise  
. . .Nowher so bisy a man as he there nas,  
And yet he semed bisier than he was”  
(“General Prologue” 312- 313, 322-323)

While the Man of Law maintains an honorable veneer, the reader is led to believe that it is merely for show (Mann 91). Like Mann, John Hirash notes that the Man of Law is

only “seeming to be judicious and dignified” (90). While Chaucer characterizes the sins according to the exegetical tradition, as is the case with the Man of Law, he provides an interesting twist on the allegorical tradition through the use of satire; like Spenser’s use of the romance within the *Faerie Queene*, Chaucer’s use of satire, particularly in the man of Law’s portrait, provides an interesting look at medieval society and literary tradition.

## WRATH

Chaucer embodies the Sin of Wrath in the Summoner, who in his own prologue “lyk an aspen leef he quook for ire” (“The Summoner’s Prologue” 1667). Chaucer’s Parson gives a lengthy description of the sin of Wrath. He notes that there are two forms of Anger; one is a hasty form of anger and the other is vengeance that is derived from forethought (*Parson’s Tale* 541-543). Chaucer draws parallels between quickly flaring anger and fire. He maintains that Pride increases wrath through spiteful words, envy wounds a man’s heart causing anger, and anger causes suffering (“The Parson’s Tale” 555). This anger drives away reason and engenders hate, discord, strife, and murder (“The Parson’s Tale” 563-564). The Parson notes two types of murder: “Some manere of homicide is spiritueel, and some is bodily” (564). With spiritual murder, the Summoner takes advantage of vulnerable individuals.

Again, clues to the character of the Summoner are woven into his description within the “General Prologue.” Several other figures such as the Miller, who could break doors with his head and had a “mouth as greet was as a greet forneys,” seem to represent the sin of wrath (“General Prologue” 32). Tupper notes that the Manicpal also

represents Wrath through his chiding (109). Though the Manciple claims, "I wol nat wratthen hym [the cook]" ("The Manciple's Prologue" 80). He chides the Cook for his drunkenness:

Thyne eyen daswen eek, as that me thynketh  
And, wel I woot, thy breeth ful soure stynketh:  
. . . Hoolde cloos thy mouth, amn by thy fader kyn!  
The devel of helle sette his foot therein!  
Thy cursed breeth infect wole us alle.  
Fy, stynkyng swyn! Fy, Foule moote thee falle!  
("The Manciple's Prologue" 31-39).

Baldwin claims that the Reeve, Miller, Friar and Summoner represent wrath (103); The Parson's claims, "whoso hath envye uon his neighebor, anon he wol comunly fynde hym a matere of wratthe in word or in dede, agayns hym to whom he hath envye" ("The Parson's Tale" 533). The Friar's wrath is also indicated by his flattery (Baldwin 103). Baldwin draws this conclusion from "The Parson's Tale," "I rekene flaterie in the vices of Ire, for ofte tyme if o man be wroth with another, thane wol he flatere some wight to sustene hym in his querele" (617). However, Wurtele claims that physiognomic clues indicate that the Reeve is wrathful. He notes the Reeve's "'sclendir' body and long thin legs 'ylak and staf'" (qtd in Wurtele 101). Wurtele claims that according to physiognomy the Reeve's slender frame suggests that he is choleric; Wurtele claims that

this “choleric disposition” is revealed through his squabble with the Miller and through his tale, which belittles a Miller (102).

However, upon examination the Summoner more thoroughly embodies the sin of Wrath. Like Tupper, Baldwin links the Summoner with wrath and notes that he is also gluttonous and lustful (Baldwin 103). Chaucer’s description of this character coincides with medieval theories concerning the humors. Bloomfield points out that the humor “choler” coincides with the Sin of wrath (213). The choleric temperament was thoroughly documented in a thirteenth century text that was attributed to Aristotle. Aristotle explains that the choleric man ““is ruddy or dark, because choler is of a hot and fiery nature . . . he is proud and bold because he has a hot heart . . . he has quick moving eyes,”” and, ““from heat he is very amorous”” (qtd. in Thorndike 406). Chaucer’s description of the Summoner had initially encouraged me to associate him with Lechery. Chaucer describes him “as hoot he was and lecherous as a sparew” (“General Prologue” 626). However, as noted above, the choleric individual is lusty because of his hot nature, and further inspection yields surprising clues to the Summoner’s true nature.

The Summoner’s visage gives him away; he had “a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,” “with eyen narwe” (“General Prologue” 624-625). While also indicative of a sexual disorder, the summoner’s visage can also denote other characteristics to the physiognomist. His appearance coupled with his heated reaction to the Friar’s taunting suggest his wrathful nature, “Those who are ‘red, bene Parcuyng and trechurus’ . . . . ‘Whose colour is as a flame of rie, he is unstable and suffereth manyacy’” (Wurtele 103)



However, Chaucer gives the reader other significant clues to denote that the Summoner is choleric, wrathful. He notes that the Summoner loved garlic, onions, and drinking strong wine, “[t]hanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood” (“General Prologue” 636).

While his red face and narrow calculating eyes define the Summoner as hot and wrathful, such a ruddy complexion could also associate him with a sanguine, lusty, man. Mann notes that onions, garlic and leeks are both biblical as well as satiric representations of moral corruption (138). The Summoner is the picture of Wrath, and he is also a dishonest man of the church court who takes bribes. He clearly takes advantage of his power, for those who cannot afford his price must suffer. Though he does not physically murder the less fortunate, he speaks falsely, betraying the power entrusted to him.

Mann notes that “the Summoner conforms to expected behavior . . . [he] is guilty of lechery . . . as well as taking bribes, he ‘makes bold’ the offenders he meets. As in Chaucer’s treatment of several other pilgrims, the ‘victims,’ here [are] the poor who can’t afford a bribe” (140). The Summoner’s portrait is laden with physical descriptions that allude to his moral corruption, but Chaucer’s use of satire begins to create an interesting trend. Like the Man of Law, the Summoner takes advantage of those less fortunate though they are both of the third estate.

## SLOTH

Sloth is associated with inactivity and negligence to duty; these qualities are evident in Chaucer’s Monk (“The Parson’s Tale” 678-680). Tupper identifies the Second Nun with the sin of sloth, though he does not explain his decision except to say that one

cannot avoid connecting the Parson's description of lust with the Prologue of the Second Nun's Tale. However, he also notes that Professor Tatlock suggested to him that "there may well be some sarcasm in putting praise of diligence into the mouth of a nun, as no charge against the regulars is commoner than that of laziness" (qtd in Tupper 111). Interestingly, Wurtele claims that physiognomy suggests that the Prioress is slothful, as she has a large forehead, which "signifieþ slouth" (Wurtele 97).

The slothful avoid a duty both to self and community. The Parson's lengthy speech upon sloth, *accidia*, deals not only with the work ethic but with good works as well ("The Parson's Tale 684"). This proves to be particularly significant for the Monk, who neglects his spiritual duties to the community. The Parson elaborates on Sloth, the sin that causes man to be "hevy, thoughtful, and wraw" ("The Parson's Tale" 676). Sloth is evident in all that one does, for one carries out these things with slackness and fretfulness, what is termed "unlust." Sloth impinges on worldly and spiritual duties, interfering with good works, and it impacts not only physical but also mental labor, making a man physically and mentally weak: "An ydel man is lyk to a place that hath no walles; the develes may entre on every side ("Parson's Tale" 715). Sloth begets "poverte and destruccioun, bothe of spiritueel and temporeel thynges. Thanne comth a manere cooldness, than freseth al the herte of a man" ("The Parson's Tale" 721). Sloth, then, is characterized not only by the physical ramifications, a lack of goods, but also by an internal reaction that begets a coldness of heart, a lack of concern.

Chaucer's Monk is clearly concerned with pursuits outside of his own class. He enjoys hunting and fills his stables with many horses. Chaucer notes that the bells on his horses ring as loud as chapel bells, which should call him back to his true spiritual duty ("General Prologue" 26). The mention of Saint Benedict implies a life of strict order in which members of the community lead a life of diligent work, prayer, and poverty (Bennett and Hollister 76-77). Yet this monk has chosen quite a different life; he asks,

"shoulde he studie and make hymselfen wood,  
Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure,  
Or swynken with his handes, and laboure  
. . . how shal the world be served?  
Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved"  
("General Prologue" 185-188).

Rather than work as Saint Augustine's rule mandates, this monk has chosen a lavish life. He takes pleasure in wearing lavish clothing, and he enjoys feasting as well. His physical description is also indicative of his temperament: "His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,/ And eek his face, as he hadde been enoynt./ He was a lord full fat and in good point" ("General Prologue" 198-200). He is a large man with a healthy complexion. The phlegmatic man is said to be "white or reddish . . . from humidity he should be fat and plain . . . From frigidity of the heart he should be meticulous slow to undertake anything . . . of obtuse genius" (Thorndike 407). The slothful monk enjoys his food, particularly a nice fat swan. Wurtele also notes that the Monk's bulging eyes are, according to

physiognomy, indicative of being “sleuthful, and unobeysant.” His slothfulness is suggested through his own admissions that he sees no reason for study; his lack of study yields one who is “little wyse” (98). The Monk, a member of the second estate, seems to consider such a life of leisure his due because of his status. Yet as a monk it is required that he forego such a privileged life for one of spiritual devotion and physical labor.

The Monk’s portrait is one that exists in a long tradition of clerical satire, and Chaucer’s treatment of the monk is typical of the tradition. Mann argues that it was typical for such a monk to be linked with the sin of gluttony (19-20). I would argue that Chaucer’s Monk was naturally disposed to the sin of gluttony as an extension of his slothfulness. The monk’s love of hunting is associated with a clerical stereotype. Mann notes that this hunting also alludes to the Monk’s sexual exploits (25). However, the Monk’s love of hunting suggests that he places worldly pursuits above his duties. Mann states, “[p]revious tradition raises the expectation that we shall be called on to make a moral judgment on the holder of, or aspirant to monastic office” (33). While Mann maintains that Chaucer is quite ambiguous, tradition would suggest that the figure was being satirized according to his failure to live up to moral standards. The Parson notes that from Sloth,:

cometh a manere coldness, that freseth al the hearte of a man./ Thanne  
cometh undevoicioun, thurgh which a man is so blent, as seith Seint  
Bernard, and hath swich languor in soule that he may neither rede ne singe  
in hooly chirche, ne here ne thynke of no devoicioun, travaille with his

handes in no good werk, that it nys hym unsavory and al appalled. (“The Parson’s Tale 722-723)

Rather than fulfill his religious duty, the monk is a lazy man who prefers pleasure to penance, and rather than work to save lost souls, he chooses to live in a worldly manner.

## AVARICE

Chaucer’s portrait of Avarice appears in the lanky guise of the Pardoner. Avarice is made up of both greed and covetousness. It is the desire of one to have material objects and withhold from those in need (“The Parson’s Tale” 743-744). The sin impoverishes and enslaves other men (“The Parson’s Tale” 755-757). Tupper argues that the Pardoner is a mix of both Avarice and Gluttony (108). Baldwin agrees with this assertion, noting that the Pardoner is a simonist and a blasphemmer (101). He blatantly admits his vice:

I preche of no thing but for coveityse.

Therefore my theme is yet, and ever was,

Radix malorum est Cupiditas.

Thus kan I preche again the same viece

Which that I use, and that is avarice . . .

I prece nothing but for coveitise. (“The Pardoner’s Prologue” 424-433)

The Pardoner makes his living by exploiting the beliefs of others. He is driven by his greed to sell false relics fooling both parish priest and laity. The Pardoner’s greed not only takes advantage of men’s purses but, essentially, bankrupts the spirituality of others.

While he may have fooled many, he certainly gave others cause, including those in his own company, to lose faith in religion and those entrusted with the moral guidance of society. The misuse of spiritual authority is addressed by the Pardoner; he notes that “[a]varice is for to witholde and kepe swiche thynges as thou hast, without rightful need” (“The Parson’s Tale” 744).

Many of the Pilgrim’s tales, as has been suggested by Tupper, address several vices. Baldwin claims that the Merchant’s is another representative of Avarice. He notes that the merchant is suspected of usury (103). The “General Prologue” claims, “[w]el koude he in eschaunge sheeldes selle” (278). The selling of shields was a way that one might borrow money, usually with interest; in the Parson’s description of Avarice he speaks against usury, “ther moote been marchantz to bryngen fro that o contree to that oother hire merchandises./ That oother marchandise, that men haunten with fraude and trecherie and decite, with lesynges and false othes, is cursed and dampnable” (“The Parson’s Tale” 779-780). Tupper notes that the Pardoner’s tale rails against Avarice and Gluttony (Tupper 98). Gluttony is a factor in his portrait. The Pardoner claims that he will have “chese and whete,/ Al were it yeven of the poverest page,/ . . . I wol drynke licour of the vyne,” and he concludes, “I shal telle a tale./ Now have I dronke a draughte of corny ale” (“The Pardoner’s Prologue” 448-456). These are often called the tavern sins: gambling, drinking, and swearing (Bloomfield 163). The Pardoner is consumed by his own appetites, and his physiognomy suggests that his appetites include more than food; his voice is “as small as hath a goot” (“General Prologue” 688). His high voice

implies that he has been castrated, and he is described rather effeminately in the “General Prologue.” The Goat is indicative of Lechery (249 Bloomfield); perhaps his description is also suggesting a much more grievous sin such as sodomy (Wurtele 103). His hair was “yellow, soft, and very thin,” and he had “glaryng” eyes (“General Prologue” 675-79). These traits are also clues to his corrupt nature: “The thinner þe heeres ben, the more gilefull, sharp, fereful, and of wynnyng covetous, it seweth” (Wurtele 103). Chaucer’s Pardoner is a character driven by avarice; however, Chaucer is satirizing the Pardoner for his fraudulent sale of relics to both clergy and laity. Yet Mann notes that the audience is amused by the Pardoner’s portrait rather than disgusted by him due to a shift in tone and the final image of the Pardoner singing excitedly in expectation of “good pickings” (150-152). Like the Monk, the Pardoner is taking advantage of his own position, and he is preying on the gullibility of others.

#### GLUTTONY

The Parson’s tale emphasizes the seriousness of the sin, Gluttony, which he notes follows the sin of avarice. Gluttony is characterized by an immoderate appetite for both eating and drinking, and the glutton becomes prey to all other sins; the Parson declares, “He that is usaunt to this synne of glotonye, he ne may no synne withstonde. He moot bgeen in servage of alle vices, for it is the develes hoord ther he hideth hym and resteth” (821). The Parson notes that there are various types of Gluttony, the first of which is drunkenness, which rids a man of reason, wit, and memory, “by to muchel drynkyng,

for which sometye a man foryeteth er the morwe what he dide at even, or on the nyght biforn” (“The Parson’s Tale,” 826).

Chaucer’s Franklin embodies the sin of Gluttony in its entirety: he is excessive in both food and drink: “Well loved he by the morwe a sop in wyn;/ to lyven in delite was evere his wone,/ for he was Epicurus owene sone” (“General Prologue” 335-336). His household was stocked with quality food and wine, and he also ate rich sauces with his food, which defies the Parson’s warning against “curiositee, with greet entente to maken and apparailen his mete” (“The Parson’s Tale” 825). Interestingly, his temperament is labeled sanguine, and while no correlation can be established between the sanguine complexion and gluttony, the sanguine temperament is indicative of the lusty man, lust being “two synnes been so ny cosyns that ofte tyme they wol nat departe” (“The Parson’s Tale” 837). This, perhaps, provides an understanding of Chaucer’s description of the Franklin’s temperament.

Tupper does not mention a connection between Gluttony and the Franklin, nor does Tupper connect him to any of the Seven Deadly Sins, perhaps this is due to the Franklin’s generosity and his skill in his chosen profession. Tupper estimates that the Cook more aptly characterizes Gluttony because of his drunken characterization in the “General Prologue” (114). Baldwin claims that both the Miller’s and the Cook’s drunkenness links them with the portrait of Gluttony constructed by the Parson’s tale (102). “The Parson’s Tale” notes, “ This synne [of Gluttony] hath manye speces. The firste is dronkenesse . . . whan a man is drunken, he hat lost his resoun” (822). Yet



Baldwin asserts that the Franklin is in fact the leading model of gluttony and pride; “He in whose house it snowed of meat and drink is taken to task with clasping at least three to five fingers of the devil’s hand that ‘draweth folk to synne,” according to St. Gregory’s “‘peces of Glotonye: . . . “The firste is for to ete biforn tyme to ete. The second is whan a man get hym to delicaat mete or drynke . . . The fourthe is curiositee, with greet entente to maken and apparailen his mete” (Baldwin 103). The descriptions in the “General Prologue” that discuss his lavish feasts echo other medieval satires on Gluttony (Mann 153). While the Cook is a popular figure associated with Gluttony, the Franklin is an excellent representation of excess and overindulgence in delicacies. He gives no thought to the starving or needy but offers his rich foods to wealthy court toadies. Chaucer’s satire extends to the administrative positions that the Franklin holds, “knight of the shire . . . shirreve . . . a contour,” which he likely takes advantage of ( 158). However, in spite of this portrait, Chaucer does not cite any blatant misdeeds; the Franklin’s indulgences in both food and wine suggest a moral decay when one considers the diatribe on the vice of Gluttony by the Parson. The Franklin begins to represent not a wealthy, generous lord but a man inclined to sin. His is the sin of Gluttony, which the Parson notes is a breeding ground for all sins; casting his every action in a rather unflattering light, this should definitely give an audience pause.

## LUST

The titillating sin of Lust is last in the Gregorian order. Of the anti-clerical tradition, the portrait of Chaucer’s Friar embodies Lust in *Canterbury Tales*. However,

there are other lustful pilgrim's in Chaucer's General Prologue; Wurtele claims that physiognomy links both the Monk and the Wife of Bath with the sin of lust. As discussed earlier, the wife's gapped teeth indicate lust, and Wurtele claims that the Monk's eyes "stepe, and rolyng in his heed" indicate his lustiness (qtd in Wurtele 98). However, Tupper claims that the Physician's portrait is indicative of the sin (110.) Yet the portrait of the Doctor of Physic declares, "Of his diete mesurable was he; For it was of no superfluitee, But of greet norissyng and digestible" (General Prologue" 435-437). This suggests that the doctor was in control of his carnal appetites. As has been mentioned, the carnal sins of lust and gluttony are closely linked. Chaucer indicates that the Friar is well acquainted with both the taverns and the barmaids: "He knew the taverns wel in every toun./ and everich hostiler and tappestere./ Better than a lazar or beggestere" ("General Prologue" 240-243). Chaucer suggests that the Friar spent more time indulging in drink and flirting with bar maids than he did aiding those in need.

The Friar's appearance is also suggestive of a life of luxury. He is a lovely young man, proud and confident, whose "nekke whit was as the flour-de-lys;/ Thereto he strong was as a champioun. . . he was lyk a maister or a pope./ Of double worsted was his semycope" ("The General Prologue" 238-260). Though he took a vow of chastity and poverty, the Friar is strong and well dressed. Chaucer is emphasizing the gentility of this friar, who like the monk has taken vows of poverty and chastity. Yet, his skills and mannerisms mark him as a lordly man: "Wel koude he synge and pleyen on a rote;/ of yeddynges he baar outrely the prise" ("The General Prologue" 235-236). He sings and

plays an instrument like a nobleman. The Friar's description begins to resemble that of the Squire. According to Margaret Hallissy, "in [Chaucer's] depiction of the Friar, he relies on behavior. The ascetic life of poverty, chastity, and obedience has no more appeal for this Friar than it did for the Prioress or the Monk. Instead, he is preoccupied with . . .sex and money" (32). His portrait depicts a man who misuses his spiritual position to satisfy his own lusts.

The Parson's tale states that Lust is broken down into "five fyngres" the first involves sight, the second touch, the third words, the fourth kissing, and the fifth the act of lechery ("The Parson's Tale" 852-862). This lechery gives rise to fornication: "another synne of Leccherie is to bireve a mayden of hir maydenhede, for he that so dooth, certes, he casteth a mayden out of the hiest degree that is in this present lif / and bireveth hir thilke precious fruyt" ("The Parson's Tale" 888-889). The Friar breaks his vow of chastity and takes advantage of the women in his parish. He is entrusted with the spiritual health of those for whom he hears confession. He takes advantage of their trust by having his way with the "worthy women of the toun," and the "faire wyves" ("General Prologue" 234). He takes away many a maidenhead. The Friar "So muchel of daliaunce and fair langage./ He hadde maad ful many a marriage/ Of younge women at his own cost" ("General Prologue" 211-212). The Friar impregnates the women and then marries them off, wiping his hands of any moral responsibility. Chaucer describes the Friar as having twinkling eyes; Wurtele notes that according to a physiognomic authority, this

suggests “wikked þoughtis . . . joye after a wickedness done”(99). It is clear that the Friar knows “much of dalliance.”

Chaucer’s clever language can seem to mask his own intent within portraits such as the Friar’s; however, when read carefully in conjunction with “The Parson’s Tale,” which discusses the actions and attributes of the sinful, the lustiness of the Friar becomes clearer. Hallissy notes that his portrait is a list of sins, primarily Lust. Mann notes that Chaucer is again ambiguous, and his skillful use of language prevents one from knowing whether or how the Friar’s way with words has sexual intent (39). However, she notes that such a satire on the Friar’s eloquence also directs the satire in a different path, the stereotypical view of a friar as a womanizer. This depiction of the lecherous friar was one used by other medieval writers, who emphasize the ease with which spiritual seduction becomes bodily seduction (40). The Friar’s position as spiritual advisor allows him entrance into the homes of believers.

While Mann questions Chaucer’s intention in his portrait of the Friar, the mere presence of “The Parson’s Tale” and its tirade upon Lust suggest that Chaucer was illuminating the Friar’s lustfulness and broken vows:

Yet been ther mo speses of this  
cursed synne; as whan that oone of hem  
is religious, ore elles bothe; or of folk that been  
entered into ordre . . ./

The thynges that greatly agreeen hire synne is the

brekyngge of hire avow of chastitee . . ./

whan they doon deedly synne, they

been the special traytours of God. (“The Parson’s Tale” 891-893)

The Friar’s lust not only makes him a traitor to God but also a traitor to those who place their spiritual well being in his hands. With sweet words, like a courtly lover, the Friar faithlessly woos women, robbing them of their virtue.

Chaucer’s “General Prologue” reflects the allegorical literary tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins. Through the “Parson’s Tale,” which reflects the medieval tradition of the exempla, Chaucer is able to characterize the nature of each vice figure, and these characteristics reflect on the pilgrims emphasizing their allegorical nature. The “Parson’s Tale” acts as a commentary on the allegorical pilgrimage that develops within the “General Prologue,” a pilgrimage that mirrors those of his contemporaries. Chaucer uses subtlety and irony as well as references to the physiognomy of the characters in order to aid his readers in deciphering the nature of these figures. Each of the sins finds expression within the “General Prologue,” and each of the pilgrims echo the tradition developed throughout mediaeval literature. However, it is a tradition that continues to impact authors well after the middle ages.

## DICKENS

### PRIDE

Pride, at the head of all sins, will figure first in discussion of Dickens's model of the sins. Theresa Love argues that Dickens is tackling pride on both a social and personal level. She claims that he attacks Victorian self-satisfaction that is born of ready means to gain wealth and knowledge. Love focuses on the spiritual consequences that she claims are suggested by Dickens's work, and she blithely considers Dickens's comedy as a transparent veil barely concealing his moral message (2). Pride exists on two levels: one is an inner pride hidden in man's heart, and the other is a public pride displayed in his appearance. The interconnected nature of the sins is illustrated in Dickens's portraits as it is in Chaucer's. Both Steerforth and Rosa exhibit a pride that evolves out of what Love terms a "class consciousness which seeks to deny human understanding and sympathy to those of a lower social group" (101). Rosa's Pride and certainly her envy drive her to treat little Emily poorly, and Steerforth's Pride in his own social standing allow him to believe that it is his due as a gentleman to have his way with a lower class woman without an offer of marriage.

However, Pride makes its appearance in Dickens's text in the guise of Uriah Heep, whose nature is hardly hidden from the viewer. Through physiognomy and imagery the reader is made aware of Uriah's nature. David's arch-enemy slithers across the page and sends chills of revulsion down the spine of the wary reader. David's first glimpse of Uriah is reminiscent of death, winter: "a red-haired person. . . . He was high-shouldered and bony; dressed in decent black, with a white wisp of a neckcloth; buttoned

up to the throat; and had a long, lank, skeleton hand, which particularly attracted my attention (213). Dickens reveals much about Uriah through the way in which his portrait is drawn, for Dickens does indeed draw us a vibrant portrait. In each aspect of Uriah, the reader is to interpret his malevolence and his wicked intent. According to Lavatar in his treatise *Physiognomy*, aspects of physiognomy are evident through all parts of the body, “yet it acts more conspicuously in the arm, from the shoulder to the ends of the fingers . . . . The moral life of man particularly reveals itself in the lines, marks, and transitions of the countenance . . . character in motion” (25-26). We see Uriah’s dreadful character in motion, his seething pride which fuels his envy of David.

What enable the reader to associate Uriah Heep with the deadly sin of Pride are the cues that Dicken’s provides for the reader in his physiognomy and false humility. Uriah’s pride resemblesw Chaucer’s “Parson’s Tale,” which notes that the pride of a man’s heart is revealed through his speech (394-398). It is within Uriah’s speech that we find much duplicity. His guise of goodness hardly conceals his malicious intent. As David begins to get to know Uriah, he is presented with a rather pathetic figure. Uriah insists that he is not a lawyer but a very “umble person” and steadfastly calls David “Master Copperfield.” Uriah explains that, after his father’s death, he came to work for Mr. Wickfield. He maintains, “How much have I to be thankful for, in that! How much have I to be thankful for, in Mr. Wickfield’s kind intentions to give me my articles, which would otherwise not lay within the umble means of mother and self” (*David Copperfield* 228-229). Uriah claims to seek no lofty position and seems to be satisfied in his service

to Mr. Wickfield. When David asks if Uriah intends to become Mr. Wickfield's partner, Uriah maintains that he is far too "umble" to aspire to such a position. David notes, "he sat, in his humility, eyeing me sideways, with his mouth widened, and the creases in his cheeks" (*David Copperfield* 229). David then observes, "[h]e certainly did look uncommonly like the carved face on the beams outside my window" (*David Copperfield* 229). This description of Uriah gives the reader the impression of a gargoyle, a sly devil that sits above and watches. It gives the impression that Uriah only waits for his opportunity to strike. The prideful man of "The Parson's Tale" hides his evil intent under a façade of righteousness, "Ypocrite is he that hideth to shewe hym swich as he is and sheweth hym swich and he is noght is" ("The Parson's Tale" 394-396). Throughout Dickens's tale, Uriah's behavior is increasingly brazen; his intentions become clear to David, the pilgrim. Like the Wife of Bath, though far less likable, Uriah seeks to assert his own greatness.

Uriah's portrait is consistent in its parallel to the Parson's diatribe on Pride; he refuses to acknowledge the authority of others, notably Mr. Wickfield, and denies the man the honor he deserves. Uriah persists in uttering falsehoods, and his writing and wriggling, like that of a snake, evokes a feeling of distaste within both David and the astute reader. His reaction to David's praise of Agnes is also indicative of his sly intentions. His response of thanks to David's praise of Agnes reads rather strangely (229). It is as if he takes it as a personal compliment, perhaps indicative of the pride that he feels in the woman that he has set his sites on. His words only vaunt what he



considers to be his own achievements. As with any prideful person, “he hath his herte and his entente in swich a proud desire to be magnified and honoured biforn the peple” (“The Parson’s Tale” 507). His constant profession of humility is a persistent vein of conversation between himself and David. Though Uriah is constantly reading and watching, he maintains that such are above him:

There are people enough to tread upon me in my lowly state, without my doing outrage to their feelings by possessing learning. Learning ain't for me. A person like myself had better not aspire. If he is to get on in life, he must get on umbly, Master Copperfield.'

I never saw his mouth so wide, or the creases in his cheeks so deep, as when he delivered himself of these sentiments: shaking his head all the time, and writhing modestly. (247)

Uriah cleverly masks his intentions with his sly speech. Like a serpent, he deceives all those around him and manipulates others to his own advantage.

Uriah proves that he is the very portrait of Pride, and he is able to spot the weaknesses in others. Through his clever tactics, he worms information out of David which David had no intentions of revealing (249). Rather than aiding Mr. Wickfield, an alcoholic, Uriah takes advantage of his kindness and his disease to plot against him. He also manipulates Mr. Micawber through his weaknesses as well. Agnes declares that Uriah has influenced her father in such a way that his business cannot function without the fiend. Uriah is clever and is always alert to what is going on around him. Agnes

realizes that Uriah has learned to take advantage of her father's weaknesses. She claims, "His ascendancy over papa . . . is very great. He professes humility and gratitude . . . his position is really one of power, and I fear he makes hard use of his power" (360). Uriah's snake-like mien and devious intentions draw parallels with the father of Lies, whose own chief sin was Pride. Yet, as Tupper notes of Chaucer's portraits, many sins become present in the type figure, and one sin naturally leads into another.

Dickens utilizes physical manifestations, such as that of the snake, in order to reinforce the associations with Uriah and the sin of Pride. Scholars in the medieval period, as Bloomfield notes, linked certain animals with specific sins. The snake was associated with Envy in the *Fairy Queen*, and in other writings it was linked with anger, avarice, gluttony, and lechery (245-248). Accompanying Uriah's undulations are the numerous allusions. David notes Uriah's appearance, "I observed that his nostrils . . . were thin and pinched" (228). This description is reminiscent of the physiognomy of a snake, having thin small nostrils. Animalistic descriptions of Uriah indicate his perverse nature. Love indicates Dickens's association between Uriah and a fox (35). David notes that Uriah and his mother sit over Mr. Wickfield's household like bats. (555). The fox denotes several connotations with the Seven Deadly Sins including envy, avarice, and lechery while the bat is also a symbol of envy (Bloomfield 248-249). Uriah's character further sketched through such associations; Dickens makes many references to Uriah as a snake. In fact, such allusions seem to appear in many of the passages concerning him.

Dickens stamps the serpentine image of Uriah upon the minds of the reader, making him an unforgettable character and associating him with the prideful Lucifer.

Regarding the interconnectedness of sins Gregory comments, “as well cometh Ire of Pride as of Envye, for smoothly he that is proud or envious is lightly wroth” (“Parson’s Tale” 534) That Uriah’s pride is closely related to envy and greed is made evident from the first through Dickens’s characterization of his mannerisms; shortly after meeting Uriah, David notes his seemingly innocuous gaze: “As he held the door open with his hand, Uriah looked at me, and looked at Agnes, and looked at the dishes, and looked at the plates, and looked at every object in the room, I thought,— yet seemed to look at nothing; he made such an appearance all the while of keeping his red eyes dutifully on his master” (224). Though he later claims to be humble and protests that he does not seek that which is beyond him, it is clear from the beginning of the novel that Uriah desires all that is seemingly beyond his reach. Uriah reveals to David that Mr. Wickfield has been imprudent, and Uriah’s intentions are gradually revealed through his interactions with others. He begins to address David as “mister” and alludes to his imminent partnership with Mr. Wickfield and his romantic pursuit of Agnes. David notes, “I recollect well how indignantly my heart beat, as I saw his crafty face, with the appropriately red light of the fire upon it” (370). The significance of such allusions becomes clear as the plot unfolds and David becomes aware of just how dire the situation is. Uriah reveals that he is hardly to be trusted. His “umble” guise lifts and David clearly sees the cunning visage

beneath. Uriah reveals that he was taught as a child that humility was a means by which to advance in the world, and David notes,

It was the first time it had ever occurred to me, that this detestable cant of false humility might have originated out of the Heep family . . . I had never doubted his meanness, his craft and malice; but I fully comprehended not, for the first time, what a base, unrelenting, and revengeful spirit, must have been engendered by this early, and this long suppression. (556-558)

Dickens's pilgrim comes to realize that Uriah urges Mr. Wickfield to drink in order to manipulate him so that he, Uriah, can gain control over his household and his business. Uriah declares his own right to marry Agnes, which motivates Mr. Wickfield to call out his torturer in front of David. This sets David into action (560). Carefully proceeding, he comes to discover just how devious the whispering serpent has been.

Uriah's aspirations and plotting are exposed through the efforts of Mr. Micawber: "What is the matter, gentlemen? What is not the matter? Villainy is the matter; baseness is the matter; deception, fraud, conspiracy, are the matter; and the name of the whole atrocious mass is HEEP" (691).

Amidst the company of his accusers, Uriah is called out for his deception, his cheating, and his manipulation. Uriah used Micawber's financial weaknesses to his advantage and exploited Mr. Wickfield's alcoholism in order to take control of the business and swindle Aunt Betsy out of her money. When the villain is confronted, David notes:

Though I had long known that his servility was false, and all his pretences knavish and hollow, I had had no adequate conception of the extent of his hypocrisy, until I now saw him with his mask off. The suddenness with which he dropped it, when he perceived that it was useless to him; the malice, insolence, and hatred he revealed; the leer with which he exulted, even at this moment, in the evil he had done- all this time being desperate too, and at his wits' end for the means of getting the better of us- though perfectly consistent with the experience I had of him, (730).

Uriah's hypocrisy is part of the characterization that identifies him with the sin of Pride. The Parson notes that pride is made up of "inobedience, avauntynge, ypocrisie, despit, arrogance, impudence, swelling of herte, insolence, elacion, inpacience, strif, contumacie, presumpcioun, irreverence, pertinacie," to name a few ("The Parson's Tale" 391).

Uriah's hypocrisy and deception reflect his sinfulness. He acts out what the Parson terms as the many twigs that make up the sin of Pride.

As the story unfolds, we see elements of Uriah's pride represented within his physical attire, as with the Wife of Bath, but we find that Uriah, the noble preacher of humility, is hardly a reliable source. Though characterized differently by their respective authors, one, the Wife, a humorous figure and the other, Uriah, distasteful, each represents Pride; both the Wife and Uriah believe themselves to be above others. The reader becomes aware of the duplicitous nature that was hidden by Uriah's sly speeches, and even when imprisoned Uriah continues with his old tricks. Like Chaucer, Dickens is

using the allegorical tradition in order to identify problems within the social system; all efforts to rehabilitate Heep are moot, as the perversion is not only within him, but in those standing in judgment. They fail to see Uriah's deception as their perspective is polluted; this is particularly relevant with respect to the Warden, who believes that Uriah is his model prisoner.

## ENVY

Dickens weaves an intricate portrait of sins through his characters; through his portrait of Uriah's, it is evident that Uriah's Pride leads to his Envy of David. However, a focused portrait of Envy is presented in the stern mien of Rosa Dartle; she exhibits those qualities with which Chaucer's Parson defines the sin of Envy. The description of Envy in Spenser's *Fairy Queen* is rather apt for Rosa's behavior: "all the poison ran about his chaw;/ But inwardly he chawed his own maw" (28). Like the Man of Law, who defames his own neighbors, Rosa's envy causes her to speak poisonously, and she is eaten up inside and has become an empty shell of a human being. Love notes the anger that arises from Rosa's envy (85). She covets what Emily had attained, Steerforth's affections.

Rosa cleverly masks her intent through her manipulation of language. Her behavior is reminiscent of the Parson's discourse on envy, "the bakbitere wol turne al thilke goodness up-so doun to his shrewed entent" ("The Parson's Tale" 494). Rosa's pretence to objectivity is as false as Uriah's protestations of humility. David remarks:

It appeared to me that she never said anything she wanted to say, outright; but hinted it, and made a great deal more of it by this practice. For example, when Mrs. Steerforth observed, more in jest than earnest, that she feared her son led but a wild life at college, Miss Dartle put in thus- 'Oh, really? You know how ignorant I am, and that I only ask for information, but isn't it always so?' (285)

Rosa's words are double-edged, David notes, "for there was always some effect of sarcasm in what Rosa Dartle said, though it was said . . . in the most unconscious manner in the world" (421). Though she may say one thing, it is certain that she means another. Later Rosa reveals her true colors, unleashing her anger and frustration upon Steerforth. She waits, watches, and listens, and she gleefully reveals Emily's tragic fall to David. She strikes Steerforth in anger but refuses to see her own self-righteousness, and rather than feel any sort of sympathy for Little Emily's plight at the hands of Steerforth. she claims:

I would have her branded on the face, drest in rags, and cast out in the streets to starve. If I had the power to sit in judgment on her, I would see it done. See it done? I would do it! I detest her. If I ever could reproach her with her infamous condition, I would go anywhere to do so. If I could hunt her to her grave, I would."(459)

Rosa's pride is accompanied by an unbridled wrath. Like the Man of Law, she sits in judgment over her fellows, but she is hardly worthy to judge Emily.

Rosa's description is that of a predator. She is reminiscent of the wolf often associated with envy (Bloomfield 246). Rosa has become a harsh and calculating figure. Steerforth notes that she "has sharpened her own face and figure these years past. She has worn herself away by constant sharpening" (Dickens 287). David spies her on his way to Dr. Strong's home: "Rosa Dartle was walking, bareheaded, with a quick impetuous step, up and down a gravel-walk on one side of the lawn. She gave me the idea of some fierce thing, that was dragging the length of its chain to and fro upon a beaten track, and wearing its heart out" (Dickens 506). Rosa seems more a Fury, the embodiment of Envy, than a woman. An unrelenting figure, she revels in the misfortunes of her fellow man, and, driven by her envy and anger, seeks to grind Emily down and cause her great harm.

Like Chaucer's Man of Law, Rosa reflects a class in whom authority has been placed. Dickens seems to suggest that a woman in her place has a responsibility to those less fortunate. Her terrible response to Emily's fall is intentionally contrasted to that of David; her actions are less human and more violently theatrical. Rosa's type is ultimately a caricature.

## WRATH

Love devotes two chapters to the major sin of Pride; she combines the work of Envy and Anger into one compact chapter. As illustrated in the previous section on Envy featuring Rosa Dartle, it is very difficult to separate the two. Rosa's portrait illustrates perfectly the way that one sin inherently leads to another. However, the character of Mr.



Murdstone figures little within Love's rather well constructed text. The sin of Wrath does not take a back seat within Dickens's work nor does it merely catch a ride with Envy. Dickens depicts a compelling portrait of Wrath in the character of Mr. Murdstone, who parallels Chaucer's Summoner. Dickens's Mr. Murdstone is guilty of homicide in much the same manner of Chaucer's Summoner, who does not physically murder the less fortunate but speaks falsely, misusing his own power. Mr. Murdstone's chiding and his wrath kill Clara's spirit; he also beats David into submission both physically and mentally.

Like Chaucer's Summoner, Mr. Murdstone is described as a dark man with dark eyes and, "hair and whiskers [that] were blacker and thicker" (Dickens 21). According to Lavatar's treatise and medieval sources, dark eyes were more common to choleric men (54). Of Murdstone's character, David observes that he is "clever and cold . . . stern and silent"(23). Like the scheming Summoner, Mr. Murdstone is clearly perceptive, and even his own friends tread carefully around his volatile disposition. Mr. Murdstone targets an ignorant subject, Clara, and seeks to manipulate her to his own advantage. By marrying the widow, he will have provided for both his sister and himself. The two, as David remarks, are quite similar: "she was dark, like her brother, whom she greatly resembled in face and voice; and with very heavy eyebrows, nearly meeting over her large nose" (45). The dark demeanor of the two brings the shadow of despair over David's home. Lavatar claims that such heavy converging brows are a sign of craft (59). Indeed, the two

dark figures stealthily manipulate David and his mother through their constant browbeating.

The chiding and cursing of Mr. Murdstone are reminiscent of the Parson's treatise on Wrath. It is through his chiding that Mr. Murdstone manipulates others. He seeks to make Clara into a puppet that he might manipulate, and in an effort to remove her own child from the house, he makes David's life miserable. David likens the Murdstone siblings to "two snakes on a wretched young bird" (Dickens 52). Their constant chiding leaves David dull and ragged, and mental abuse swiftly escalates to physical. David is boxed on the ears with his Latin Grammar book, and eventually Mr. Murdstone proceeds to break him with a cane. He warns David, "if I have an obstinate horse or dog to deal with, what do you think I do . . . I beat him. . . I make him wince, and smart. I say to myself, 'I'll conquer that fellow;' and if it were to cost him all the blood he had, I should do it" (Dickens 43). He succeeds in beating the boy, and cows him not merely by his physical abuse but also through his wretched treatment of David's mother. After her death, Mr. Murdstone takes a special pleasure in forcing David to work for him in dreadful conditions.

After running away, David is aided by his Aunt Betsy, and in order to determine what to do with the boy, she writes to the Murdstones, who promptly visit. She, however, quickly ascertains Mr. Murdstone's character and his mistreatment of David and his mother. She accuses, "you had not done wrong enough to her and hers, you must begin to train her, must you? begin to break her, like a poor caged bird, and wear her

deluded life away, in teaching her to sing your notes . . . you were a tyrant to the simple baby, and you broke her . . . you gave her the wounds she died of. There is the truth for your comfort” (Dickens 207). David’s scrape with Wrath ends in his aunt’s own righteous wrath. Yet, interestingly enough, it is through Mr. Murdstone’s maneuvering that David was to be introduced to Sloth in the guise of Mr. Micawber.

## SLOTH

As with Chaucer’s Monk, Mr. Micawber is linked with the sin of Sloth, which is characterized by idleness and disregard for one’s personal and public responsibilities. During Micawber’s accusations of Uriah Heep, he alludes to his own part in what he terms a Canterbury Pilgrimage (David Copperfield 730). As Dickens’ portrait of Sloth Mr. Micawber mirrors the self-absorbed Monk; both men are concerned with their own comfort and pleasure. Like the Monk, Micawber is a slave to his appetites, and by living a lifestyle beyond his means, Micawber reaps the unfortunate consequence of his Sloth. Both men consider that they are due a life of gentility because of birth. However, though the Monk may be privileged by birth, he is required, because of his calling, to give up his life of wealth and leisure for a life of devotion and toil. Micawber, due to his financial constraints, should be driven by a completely different set of moral obligations inspired by his duty to family. Yet like the monk, he refuses to surrender overindulgences to responsibility, and his “poverty” is the consequence of his own Slothful nature.

Upon meeting him David views

a stoutish, middle-aged person, in a brown surtout and black tights and shoes, with no more hair upon his head (which was a large one, and very shining) than there is upon an egg, and with a very extensive face, which he turned full upon me. His clothes were shabby, but he had an imposing shirt-collar on. He carried a jaunty sort of a stick, with a large pair of rusty tassels to it; and a quizzing-glass hung outside his coat,- for ornament, I afterwards found, as he very seldom looked through it, and couldn't see anything when he did.

'This,' said Mr. Quinion, in allusion to myself, 'is he.'

'This,' said the stranger, with a certain condescending roll in his voice, and a certain indescribable air of doing something genteel. (Dickens 151)

In an effort to maintain his way of life, Micawber puts up a façade; he continues to behave like a gentleman and to live like one. Yet his creditors, David notes, are his only visitors, and the commotion they caused sends Micawber into a fit of embarrassment and despair, “even to the length . . . of making motions at himself with a razor, but within half an hour afterwards, he would polish up his shoes with extraordinary pains, and go out, humming a tune” (Dickens 154). Like the choleric man, Micawber is quick to calm his emotions, but his behavior is what the Parson would term a “coward champioun recreant” (Chaucer 311). Embodying Sloth, he quickly is overwrought and gives into defeat evincing a rather lackluster performance in all aspects of his life. However, he is a

likable fellow; the lesson he presents to a young David is a rather slippery slope. Mr. Micawber represents what Malcolm Andrews calls one of Dicken's various depictions of "shabby-gentility," a way of living that a young David could easily have fallen into. In the end, David chooses to be a studious and industrious man. Yet Micawber represents a sector of society that Dickens seems to suggest clearly needs reform.

Micawber's means can barely cover his many debts, and soon, he is cast into debtors' prison due to his "negligence, or recchelesnesse" ("The Parsons Tale" 709). He eventually leaves London, and, after a series of failed ventures, he falls prey to Uriah Heep. Upon meeting Micawber in Canterbury, David finds him "where Uriah Heep had been of old accustomed to sit, Mr. Micawber plying his pen with great assiduity. He was dressed in a legal-looking suit of black, and loomed, burly and large, in that small office" (548). Micawber eventually falls deeper into debt by borrowing heavily from Uriah Heep, and he begins to withdraw, developing a short manner with both his family and his old friend David. David remarks, "[t]hough I saw an uneasy change in Mr. Micawber, which sat tightly on him, as if his new duties were a misfit, I felt I had no right to be offended" (Dickens 549). Towards his wife, he becomes distant and disagreeable. In a letter to David Mrs. Micawber states:

Mr. Micawber is entirely changed. He is reserved. He is secret. His life is a mystery to the partner of his joys and sorrows . . . Mr. Micawber is morose. He is severe. He is estranged from our eldest son and daughter, he has no pride in his twins, he looks with an eye of coldness even on the

unoffending stranger who last became a member of our circle. The pecuniary means of meeting our expenses, kept down to the utmost farthing are obtained from him with great difficulty, and even under fearful threats. (Dickens 608-609)

While Micawber is now working, his own slothfulness, appetite, and greed have placed him in this position. One must also take into account Micawber's large family, which is suggestive of his lustful appetite, a natural link in the chain of his sins. He must relinquish the privileges of a genteel life, first his life of leisure and the rich appetite that accompanies such a life.

As the allegorical figure of Sloth, Micawber is a product of his idle ways, unable to govern himself; he can neither maintain productivity nor moderate his expenditures. This has caused him to fall into debt time and again. He is a slave to his own appetite, in a sense, and because he has decided to live beyond his means, he is a slave to societal standards, and in the end he must leave the country as a result of his sin.

#### AVARICE

Avarice or the sin of greed is represented by Mr Barkis in *David Copperfield*. His sin is damaging to society; rather than helping those in need, Mr. Barkis hides his wealth away beneath his bed. St. Augustine claims that an avaricious man's wretchedness is an extension of his unending desire for material wealth and his compulsive desire to guard it (103). Avarice, as portrayed in the guise of Mr. Barkis, speaks to Chaucer's point that the sin enslaves men ("Parson's Tale" 755-756). While slavery was not an institution in

Victorian Britain, one needs only give heed to the workhouses to realize how greed and covetousness impacted society.

The parson describes a counterpart to what Love terms Barkis's hording. The Parson notes that "the avaricious man hath more hope in his catel than in Jhesu Crist, and doothmoore observance in keypyng of his tresour than he dooth to the service of Jhesu Crist" ("The Parson's Tale" 746). Barkis's hoarding becomes more evident later in the novel, but upon meeting the man. David notes that

"The carrier's horse was the laziest horse in the world, I should hope, and shuffled along, with his head down, as if he liked to keep people waiting . . . The carrier had a way of keeping his head down, like his horse, and of drooping sleepily forward as he drove. (Dickens 26)

Dicken's comparison of Barkis to his horse is suggestive of avarice as well as sloth; Bloomfield notes that the horse was linked to the sin of avarice (247). In the eighteenth-century Lavatar connected the likeness of animal to man and the effects of such semblances upon temperament. He spends a significant amount of time expounding upon the anatomy of a horse, eventually likening them to types of men (227-231). Dickens's text also alludes to Barkis's slothful nature. David claims that he is "of a phlegmatic temperament, and not at all conversational— I offered him a cake as a mark of attention, which he ate at one gulp, exactly like an elephant, and which made no more impression on his big face than it would have done on an elephant's" (*David Copperfield* 61).

Allusions to the phlegmatic temperament link him with the sin of Sloth, and like the slothful Mr. Micawber, Barkis is fat and plain.

Barkis's avaricious characterization involves elements of both Sloth and Gluttony harkening back to the notion that the sins are often links on a chain of self-destruction. Like Micawber, Barkis is a rather likable fellow and, again, this is what makes many of these figures such a threat to David. Their seemingly innocuous nature masks the damaging nature of their sins. Barkis, like Micawber, is consumed by his appetites, and his pursuit of Peggotty is driven by his love of food. He asks after David says, "She makes all our pastry and does all our cooking," "Do she though?" (*David Copperfield* 61). His great appetite is later noted on his wedding day; "although he had eaten a good deal of pork and greens at dinner, and had finished off with a fowl or two, he was obliged to have cold boiled bacon for tea, and disposed of a large quantity without any emotion" (*David Copperfield* 140-141). Yet his gluttony is clearly secondary to his avaricious ways. Much of his existence has been spent holding his assets near by, as he travels with his box and even hides it under his death bed, claiming that it is merely "old clothes" (*David Copperfield* 433). Indeed, he carries his wealth with him like Avarice in Spenser's parade of vices, "upon a Camell loaden all with gold;/ two iron coffers hong on either side,/ With precious mettall full, as they might hold." (85).

Barkis becomes the caretaker of Peggotty's comfort, and yet he meagerly doles out coin to her. Peggotty reveals that her husband is a miser who keeps his money "a little near." The man claims that the box is merely full of old clothing, but he secretly



removes small amounts and gives them to Peggotty after much scheming on her part; “the smallest installments could only be tempted out by artifice; so that Peggotty had to prepare a long and elaborate scheme, a very Gunpowder Plot, for every Saturday's expenses (*David Copperfield* 146). Barkis is soon rendered ill and bed ridden, and his sin soon escalates. He becomes consumed with protecting his hoard while staunchly protesting his own poverty. His sharp eye guards the box of “old clothes” carefully:

'I wish it was money, sir,' said Mr. Barkis.

'I wish it was, indeed,' said I.

'But it AIN'T,' said Mr. Barkis, opening both his eyes as wide as he possibly could. (*David Copperfield* 300)

Though miserly, the fellow is very likable and quite humorous, which illustrates the misleadingly benign nature of his character. Dickens's portrayal renders the deceptiveness of the sin of Avarice. The author depicts the ridiculous measures that Barkis undertakes in order to keep his wealth a secret. Barkis's groans and suffering over the box of “old clothes” are indicative of the inner torment brought on by sin, and his untruths, while harmless, are a sign of his mental perversion. With each visit David learns that Barkis is “a little nearer” and at the end of his life he has the box moved to his bed-side:

He was lying with his head and shoulders out of bed, in an uncomfortable attitude, half resting on the box which had cost him so much pain and trouble . . . His arm lay on it now. Time and the world were slipping from

beneath him, but the box was there; and the last words he had uttered were  
(in an explanatory tone) 'Old clothes!' (*David Copperfield* 433)

It is perhaps easy to concede the acceptability of such a frugal nature; yet, while he is generous with his money, willing it to those who would put it to good use, he does little to help those in need around him during his lifetime. I concur with Love in her conclusion that the overweening desire to accumulate wealth is an indication of moral decay. (40). Barkis acquires no pleasure from those things of beauty that he possesses, such as a golden watch, because it is in his nature to hide these things away. Rather than living, Avarice spends his days consumed with the safe keeping of possessions.

#### GLUTTONY

Dickens's picture of Gluttony is rather bleak, and a consideration of the sin brings to mind the many hungry impoverished characters that populate his fiction; Oliver Twist and the Cratchits spring to mind. However, the form of Gluttony that resides in both Barkis and Micawber is merely one facet of the detrimental sin. Micawber's gluttony is interesting as it is certainly indicative of his carnal appetites. *David Copperfield* portrays Gluttony in the character of Mr. Wickfield; he is representative of the glutton who overindulges in alcohol. "The Parson's Tale" notes that the sin is distinguished by immoderate appetites for eating as well as drinking ("The Parson's Tale" 826). A glutton's vulnerability to all other sins would explain Mr. Wickfield's malleability in the hands of Uriah Heep.

The Franklin is of the landed gentry, and his station speaks to that of Mr. Wickfield; like Chaucer, Dickens suggests that Mr. Wickfield's appetite is detrimental to both his family and society. Though Mr. Wickfield is a lawyer, his social status and wealth become an important focal point in the tale, as Uriah Heep covets his position. Mr. Wickfield's gluttony centers on alcohol. Interestingly, Theresa Love focuses on Dickens's attack on the abuse of food and suggests that through his characters Dickens is literally attacking Victorian appetite. Love claims that Dickens "chastens the rich for their excessive eating; he does not attack them with the same viciousness for their drinking" (71). She asserts that Dickens viewed alcoholism as a vice of the poor; yet Mr. Wickfield is the very embodiment of this gluttonous excess.

Mr. Wickfield represents a very well-to-do glutton, and upon meeting him David notes, "There was a certain richness in his complexion, which I had been long accustomed, under Peggotty's tuition, to connect with port wine; and I fancied it was in his voice too, and referred his growing corpulency to the same cause" (214). He evinces the effects of gluttony in both manner and appearance, and his excessive drinking is evident every evening: "Mr. Wickfield sat down to drink, and drank a good deal" (Dickens 226). His drinking increases as Uriah gradually gains control over his business. David, our Pilgrim Everyman, is unable to distinguish the detrimental nature of Mr. Wickfield's character; rather, he judges the man by his gentility and station, remarking to the dreadful Uriah Heep that Mr. Wickfield "is worth five hundred of you-or-me" (*David Copperfield* 369). Yet Mr. Wickfield's nature has made him "imprudent." It has put him

in a precarious position with regards to Heep, placing him “under his thumb. Un-der-his thumb” (*David Copperfield* 370). Mr. Wickfield’s physical degeneration is noted by David. His ruddy complexion, bloodshot eyes and palsy do not offend David so much as Mr. Wickfield’s submission to Uriah Heep; yet as a portrait of Gluttony Mr. Wickfield too “foryeteth er morowe what he dide at even” (“The Parson’s Tale” 823). Uriah takes full advantage of this loss of wits, making Mr. Wickfield into a mere puppet, mindlessly agreeing to all that Uriah “umbly” suggests. Uriah as Envy, an extension of his sin of Pride, manipulates Mr. Wickfield as Gluttony, through his weakness, continually encouraging him to overindulge in alcohol. David notes,

I had observed yesterday, that he [Uriah] tried to entice Mr. Wickfield to drink; . . .

I passed over Mr. Wickfield’s proposing my aunt, his proposing Mr. Dick, his proposing Doctor’s Commons, his proposing Uriah, his drinking everything twice; his [Mr. Wickfield’s] consciousness of his own weakness, the ineffectual effort that he made against it. (*David Copperfield* 559)

Wickfield would have lost all, business, property, and even his daughter, had it not been for the help of his friends. Like Mr. Micawber, he is a slave to his nature and cannot, even for the sake of his own daughter, overcome it. While Micawber assists in Mr. Wickfield’s reclamation, it is important to note that it is through David’s agency that change takes place. He represents the free will of mankind and the ability of man to

change society. However, it is Mr. Wickfield's failure to assert control over his own household that leads to a disruption in the running of home, business, and society. Uriah is able to infiltrate Mr. Wickfield's home, threatening his daughter's peace, robbing him of his own profits, and swindling members of the community out of their money.

## LUST

Like many of the figures, these walking Sins, within Dickens's works, Steerforth is initially quite a likable fellow. He is, with his imperious nature, much like Mr. Wickfield. Steerforth, a lovely young man, proud and confident, much like Chaucer's Friar, represents the sin of Lust. Steerforth's situation is as odd as that of the Friar; Steerforth was a prince even among this schoolyard of middle-class children, and even in this setting his nature is made clear; David claims, "I was not considered as being formally received into the school, however, until J. Steerforth arrived. Before this boy, who was reputed to be a great scholar, and was very good looking . . . I was carried as before a magistrate" (*David Copperfield* 81). After making away with David's shillings, he asks David if he has a sister, and when the answer is no, he exclaims, "That's a pity . . . 'If you had had one, I should think she would have been a pretty, timid, little, bright-eyed sort of girl. I should have liked to know her'" (Dickens 84). One gets the impression that his intentions towards women are hardly as noble as his proud bearing, and David's own misguided love of Steerforth reflects the struggle that Everyman must face. Like any reader of an allegory, whether medieval or modern, David must learn to discern the nature of those around him in order to grow into a socially, morally upright individual.

His own words illustrate that not only is he unable to discern the nature of those around him, but he is also unable to protect Emily:

It was a night tide; and soon after we went to bed, Mr. Peggotty and Ham went out to fish. I felt very brave at being left alone in the solitary house, the protector of Em'ly and Mrs. Gummidge, and only wished that a lion or a serpent, or any ill-disposed monster, would make an attack upon us, that I might destroy him, and cover myself with glory. But as nothing of the sort happened to be walking about on Yarmouth flats that night, I provided the best substitute I could by dreaming of dragons until morning. (143-144)

Dickens gives us a glimpse of a figure that poses a threat to Little Emily. The imagery of the serpent recalls the sin in the Garden of Eden and a sexual awareness spawned by it. We are warned that she will face an onslaught, and the knowledgeable reader will realize that Eve must fall.

While Dickens's Steerforth does not break a vow of chastity, as does the Friar, he does take advantage of a trust granted to him by Mr. Peggotty. After being welcomed into Mr. Peggotty's home, Steerforth mocks his hospitality by taking advantage of the one person that Peggotty values most. Like the Friar, who was entrusted with the care of his parishioner, Steerforth takes advantage of a girl entrusted to his care. Both figures represent Lust, a figure that makes away with maidenheads. Steerforth seems to have good intentions towards Emily and claims "that to me she seems to be throwing herself

away; that I am sure she might do better; and that I swear she was born to be a lady”  
(*David Copperfield* 324).

The lion, pride, is also indicative of Steerforth. David exclaims to Mr. Peggotty, “‘Yes! That's just his character,' said I. 'He's as brave as a lion, and you can't think how frank he is, Mr. Peggotty’”(136). Dickens’s dissatisfaction with the wealthy class, and their haughty pride, is evident in the way that Steerforth’s mistreatment of Little Emily is played out. Steerforth uses his wealth and station in order to take advantage of the less fortunate, on whom he clearly looks down, “‘Why, there's a pretty wide separation between them and us,' said Steerforth, with indifference” (286). For all of his proud bearing and appearance, his character pales in comparison to the sterling quality of Mr. Peggotty and Ham. He lures Little Emily away with promises of marriage; the nature of his sin is unforgivable. While Steerforth does not technically commit adultery, he robs Ham of his would be bride, which leads the reader to link Steerforth’s actions with adultery. The Parson’s tale breaks down the sin of lechery into adultery and lust and claims that the sin of lust tears down both the soul and the body.

In what seems an effort to cover his sins, Steerforth, much like Chaucer’s Friar, attempts to tidy up his own mess by arranging a marriage between Littimer and Emily: “‘But Mr. James, I must say, certainly did behave extremely honorable; for he proposed that the young woman should marry a very respectable person, who was fully prepared to overlook the past, and who was, at least, as good an anybody the young woman could have aspired to in a regular way: her connections being very common’” (Dickens 651).

The text clearly shows Dickens's distaste for the vice, and it is evident that the blame is not placed on the fallen woman. Rather, it is Steerforth, Lust, who bears the brunt of the burden, an abject creature who misuses his power and station to manipulate an innocent who only seeks to look up, out of the poverty in which she was born. Emily is an innocent who has been misled, and Dickens establishes Steerforth as the guilty party through the events which transpire. While Emily is forced to leave the country because of her misdeeds, Steerforth faces a literal death, which accompanies his spiritual death. He seeks a life out at sea, on that perhaps mirrors that of the honest fisherman Ham, perhaps reminiscent of the disciples of Christ, yet is lost amidst the storm and must die.

Unlike Ham's death, which is noble, Steerforth's demise is fraught with hopelessness and a grasping helplessness as he holds tenaciously onto the ship's mast: "he clung to it. He had a singular red cap on, —not like a sailor's cap, but of a finer color; and as the few yielding planks between him and destruction rolled and bulged, and his anticipative death-knell rung, he was seen by all of us to wave it" (Dickens 775). The steady influence of symbol and character lend credence to an allegorical reading of Steerforth; yet, like several of Dickens's other characters, including Mr. Micawber and Mr. Barkis, there are noble elements to Steerforth's character. Perhaps the nobility and tenacity one sees in Steerforth's struggle are also indicative of the human spirit beset by vice and tossed about upon the ocean. However one is left with the image of Steerforth's red cap, an ill-fated color, which seems to further allude to his nature, a red flag if you will. Those who carried his body refused to lay it beside Ham's, feeling Steerforth



unworthy. Worth in this novel is not merely gauged by social status and wealth but by a different barometer, a moral standard, and amidst the storms wreaked by these Vices, Dickens seems to dive in in an attempt to save a hopelessly misguided society from their own despondency.

## Chapter III

### **The Tradition of Allegory and Social Reform**

*No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. (T.S. Eliot 28).*

Dickens utilizes the Seven Deadly Sins in a way that evokes Chaucer's own social satire. By comparing the figures in *David Copperfield* to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Dickens makes use of a decisively witty, yet traditional form of allegory. Rather than burdening his reader with one loathly, staid figure after another, Dickens presents a cast of intricate and often humorous characters in order to criticize the failings of society. Dickens's novel focuses upon the imbalanced economic environment that produced a glut of impoverished and struggling workingmen and women whose living and working environments were hardly cause for contentment. The poor were always left looking up, beyond, and out of their dismal world at a greater class of individuals who, more often than not, made their lives more difficult.

Jill Mann's discussion of Chaucer's estates satire examines the role that morality plays in Chaucer's creation of the portraits in his "General Prologue." She states:

Chaucer convinces us of the individuality of his pilgrims, about the nature of his irony, and the kind of moral standards implicit in the

Prologue. This leads me to suggest that Chaucer is ironically substituting for the traditional moral view of social structure a vision of a world where morality becomes as specialized to the individual as his work-life. (xi)

Society is organized according to estates and duties, and *David Copperfield*, when viewed in comparison with Tupper's model, suggests that there are many figures who neglect their duties and abuse their authority. Mann's special attention to each portrait provides a glimpse into Chaucer's own particular ironies with regards to each portrait, each class; these "historical prototypes" provide an enlightening backdrop to Dickens's *David Copperfield*. Mann argues that Chaucer is not making a moral judgment through his portraits but, rather, his *Canterbury Tales* reflects the influence of medieval literary tradition (190). The focus of this study relies not on the view of the modern critic but on that of the Victorian reader. Both Dickens and his readers were impacted by the medieval revival and the emerging popularity of Chaucer and his allegory. This familiarity with allegory impacted both the way in which Dickens wrote and his audience interpreted *David Copperfield*. Yet, even Mann notes that Chaucer's text may have been influenced by allegorical treatises that depict the vices and virtues (181). While Mann is rather skeptical of embracing literary tradition, it is important to note that she has not completely ruled out the ties between Chaucer and literary tradition. For instance, she notes that the Summoner's portrait adheres to typical descriptions of

one in his position, a “consistory court official” (139). She likens Chaucer’s portrait of the Summoner to Langland’s own diatribe on these corrupt officials (140).

Prior to Dickens’s own time, Chaucer’s society was facing disruption and corruption within religious and political mechanisms. In a time of religious destabilization, the Avignon Papacy, and social turmoil caused by plague, Chaucer’s tales, works in a tradition of medieval estates satire, clearly satirize the misdeeds of political and religious figures. Chaucer may have used the allegory of the Seven Deadly Sins in order to call attention to those social ills that were taking place. In *Social Chaucer*, Paul Strohm argues that Chaucer raises social issues which are reflected in the *Canterbury Tales*. He notes that the Tales embody both a “hierarchical” and “communal” model of society and “negotiate various compromises between them” (157). Strohm suggests that *The Canterbury Tales* criticizes a hierarchical order that prevents the inclusion of all in the social discussion. Indeed, Chaucer allows each pilgrim to have a voice. Through the use of irony, Chaucer encourages his readers to question not merely the individual depicted in his portraits in the “General Prologue” but the vices and virtues that accompanied an individual’s station as well. The portraits that he depicts in the “General Prologue” also imply institutional corruption. Chaucer pokes fun at those injustices within the social hierarchy, and he seems to use the simple plowman as a worthy example of everyman. He is employing a religious trope by mimicking the morality tradition and depicting figures from all walks of life as the Seven Deadly Sins.

Chaucer's description of the plowman, similar to that found in *Piers Plowman*, invited his later Victorian readers to empathize with the impoverished peasant who toils constantly without getting ahead; he is oppressed by the system. Collette notes that class was a central theme in nineteenth-century: "Chaucer criticism indirectly addressed the social divisions of nineteenth-century industrial society, particularly the rifts among the urban middle class and the laboring poor both industrial and agricultural" (119). Dickens, too, notes the way in which the downtrodden are oppressed by the system; we see David, a young boy left without a protector, who is misused by those who are supposed to ensure his well-being. It is also a system that encourages men of a certain class to keep up certain appearances, a system that breeds greed and allows the lusty privileged to steal away innocence.

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens created character types akin to those of Chaucer. Dickens's allegorical figures represent the Seven Deadly Sins, and his tale falls into this allegorical literary tradition. Satire propels the humor that attends Mr. Wilkins Micawber and the obnoxious but humorous way in which we see Uriah ingratiating himself to those around him. The extremities to which Dickens takes his portrayals parallel the portraits created by Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*, but they also encourage the Victorian reader to turn a critical eye from these often humorous and undoubtedly entertaining figures to their own society. While modern scholars, such as Andrews, Love, Vogel, and Thurin maintain that Dickens participated in the allegorical tradition, the Victorian audience's familiarity with and fondness for Chaucer's work would have fostered associations

between the two works. Dickens's various references to the *Canterbury Tales* within his novel, coupled with the many articles circulating throughout mid-century periodicals concerning Chaucer and allegory, would have encouraged such links. While it may be difficult for a modern reader to read *David Copperfield* allegorically, a nineteenth-century audience would have been open to the suggestion. Their awareness of Dickens's reform efforts could well have reminded readers of Chaucer's own use of the Seven Deadly Sins during what Victorians considered a simpler time, one that offered a moral compass that could help redirect the course of their seemingly corrupt society.

Dickens employs allegory in order to bring awareness to the Victorian middle class. In fact, Andrews claims that Dickens "mixes allegorical and realist characters," and

[h]e was sufficiently in tune with sociological developments of his time to interest himself in the extent to which social and economical circumstances shaped identity. Indeed, much of his reformist agenda – in education and social welfare – is founded on his strong sense that lives can be fundamentally changed by changes to the cultural and economic environment, and that we are, to a great extent, what our life circumstances have made us, not just in material terms but in terms of our disposition. (78)

Dickens was cognizant of the way in which social position seemed to dictate personality. Dickens's characterization of the figures in *David Copperfield* also suggests that he was aware of the connections between social positions and those vices which attend them.

During the nineteenth century, individuals noticed the many evils in the world; poverty, substandard housing, and poor education were hindrances to personal self-fulfillment and the right to the freedom of choice. Novelists like Dickens realized that in order to liberate these individuals, they would have to cultivate, motivate, and educate the public, inducing the public to utilize their authority in order to change the system. His contemporaries were aware of his “reformist social vision . . .the *Edinburgh Review*, for example, observing that he ‘directs our attentions to the helpless victims of untoward circumstances, or a vicious system – to the imprisoned debtor – the orphan pauper – the parish apprentice – the juvenile criminal’ (Waters157). Dickens clearly believed that the system was polluted with vice.

I believe that the *Bildungsroman* has been impacted by a rich literary tradition, which includes that of the morality tradition. The morality tradition did not die out with the Middle Ages; indeed, it can be found within the advertisement pages of Dickens’s *All The Year Round* in issue 24 in March of 1880 (3). Likewise, allgory was often a topic of articles within *All The Year Round*, *Household Words*, and other contemporary papers such as *Cornhill*. Though such articles were religious, or were on religious topics, Dickens’s religious views are not the focus of this study, as these are more adequately covered in other scholarly works. Yet it has been noted that “Dickens’s religion is always oriented towards society and social action” (Walder 141). Walder notes that Dickens uses religion in order to convey the needs of the poor caused by economic disparity to an empathetic middle-class audience; yet he also accedes to the notion that

Dickens's fiction is representative of a phase in the secularization of literature (147).

Like Chaucer, Dickens employed religious content for secular purposes.

Dickens uses the Seven Deadly Sins, types in the guise of such figures as Mr. Wickfield and Mr. Micawber to illustrate that vice is not merely a personal stumbling block but that the vices associated with these social positions impact society. The pride of Rosa Dartle engendered hate for the less-fortunate Emily, who was taken advantage of by lusty Steerforth. Lack of restraint, immoderation, yields an imbalance in an individual. It is this lesson that David must learn from those around him. He learns to temper his emotions through his struggles with those Vices that he encounters, and he comes to recognize, though he loved Steerforth, the imbalance that caused his hero's fall. He leans to temper his appetites by watching the struggles of Micawber and Wickfield. David's critical view of Uriah Heep is not merely an attack on personal greed but also speaks to the greed that is born of the religious schools, such as the school Uriah attended as a child, that squash the human spirit. Through David's path we realize that elevation of the mind produces an individual who will choose the correct moral path. Dickens lived in an era beset by religious difficulty. According to Daniel Jenkins:

The direct social consequences of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism was undoubtedly deeply conservative, in turning people's minds away from the critical analysis of the society in which they were set and encouraging them to take the structures and the distribution of power within them for



granted at a time when they were changing rapidly and badly needed critical examination. (88)

Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* responds to this need in evoking a sense of social guilt and awareness in readers.

Within the pages of *David Copperfield* we find evidence of Dickens's dissatisfaction with the moral and political system. While working with Mr. Spenlow, David becomes troubled by the proceedings of a flimsy divorce case, which was based entirely on the notion that the said individual had not written his entire name upon the certificate and, therefore, the marriage was not legal. David wonders at the justice of the system, "But Mr. Spenlow argued the matter with me. He said Look at the world, there was good and evil in that; look at the ecclesiastical law, there was good and evil in that. It was all part of a system. Very good. There you were!" (*David Copperfield* 466). Yet here Dickens suggests that the system is hardly functioning properly. Society's religious bearings have been lost, and the guidance provided by the government is dysfunctional. Later Spenlow speaks directly to the issue of public trust in institutions:

It was a question of feeling. If the public felt that their wills were in safe keeping, and took it for granted that the office was not to be made better, who was the worse for it? Nobody. Who was the better for it? All the sinecurists. Very well. Then the good predominated. It might not be a perfect system; nothing was perfect; but what he objected to, was the insertion of the wedge. Under the Prerogative Office, the country had been

glorious. Insert the wedge into the Prerogative Office, and the country would cease to be glorious. He considered it the principle of a gentleman to take things as he found them; and he had no doubt the Prerogative Office would last our time. I deferred to his opinion, though I had great doubts of it myself. (*David Copperfield* 467)

Dickens suggests that business as usual merely for the sake of comfort is hardly the best objective. Though the matter is a small one, as they are merely arguing over public offices and the safety of individual wills, he is emphasizing the way in which the system continues unchallenged. He also seems to encourage his reader to become a “wedge.”

The system promulgates a sense of privilege and a type of behavior that is demeaning to the less fortunate. Steerforth’s behavior to Mr. Mell is indicative of such actions. His own words are privileged, even over those of an authoritative figure, and his status grants him power over the lives of others. David notes, “It always gave me pain to observe that Steerforth treated him with systematic disparagement, and seldom lost an occasion of wounding his feelings” (*David Copperfield* 90). The system in place is one that enables Uriah’s triumphal rise to wealth and privilege. While Uriah pledges himself to morality and humility, it is clear that these values have been perverted. Rather than fostering a notion that he might succeed through the development of his imagination and intelligence, his education taught him to succeed through humility. Uriah’s training in humility bred contempt. It is up to the individual to change the world, since the system

has failed. David's trip to Mr. Creakle's prison reveals Dickens's perspective on the mechanisms of society:

Outside prison-doors, we began our inspection . . . . I wondered whether it occurred to anybody, that there was a striking contrast between these plentiful repasts of choice quality, and the dinners, not to say of paupers, but of soldiers, sailors, laborers, the great bulk of the honest, working community; of whom not one man in five hundred ever dined half so well. But I learned that the 'system' required high living; and, in short, to dispose of the system, once for all, I found that on that head and on all others, 'the system' put an end to all doubts, and disposed of all anomalies. Nobody appeared to have the least idea that there was any other system, but the system, to be considered . . . . what were supposed to be the main advantages of this all-governing and universally overriding system? I found them to be the perfect isolation of prisoners— so that no one man in confinement there, knew anything about another; and the reduction of prisoners to a wholesome state of mind, leading to sincere contrition and repentance. (*David Copperfield* 828)

The actions of Uriah Heep are totally reprehensible; however, they are not merely personally damaging to those around him. Like Micawber, he cheats those around him. Micawber's deception seems innocuous at first; however, he avoids paying his bills and is essentially stealing from the pockets and mouths of others. His theft impacts

merchants who are laboring to provide for their own needy families. In prison, Uriah is seen reading his Bible and professing his own reformation. Yet, the reader is made well aware of the fact that neither religion nor isolation has made any sort of change in the character of Uriah Heep. The system is broken, and due to the instability and perversion of moral belief, the individual cannot be rehabilitated through the same methods. Therefore, Dickens attempts to alert the reading public to these institutional failures by employing stark, allegorical characters to highlight the flaws in the institution and society at large.

Guilt is defined in the nineteenth century as a “breach of ethics; as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it in the primary meaning: ‘A failure of duty delinquency, offence, crime, sin.’” (qtd. in Borne 15). Sin in *David Copperfield* reflects these notions of guilt. Though both Martha and Little Emily fall, the text reviles Rosa Dartle’s pride and anger, and through the mistreatment of these two women, and consequently Little Emily’s metaphorical exile, the working class and middle class reader is implicated as being complicit in this sin. The reader, typically middle class, would likely have identified with Rosa’s station and sensibility. There were no recourses for fallen women like little Emily. Likewise, Dickens’s novel illustrates the figure of Avarice in Mr. Barkis, a sin typically found in the wealthy individual, such as Mr. Dombey and Scrooge; again this is a mark of complicity, as few middle class readers sought to aid poor laborers on whose backs such fortunes were often made. The scheming businessman on the rise is targeted through Dickens’s portrait of Envy. What measures will man take to gain

success? What becomes of a rich man overcome with his own petty gluttony? Mr. Wickfield fails in his familial and personal duties; as the manager of his family's welfare and the welfare of so many whose finances he controls, he represents a class of man held accountable to society for his failure. The financial ruin his personal decisions cause are not tabulated on a moral abacus, but on a social one, and his decisions contribute to the collapse of a system. Rather than orderly running his business and family, his indulgence causes the breakdown of his business and ultimately impacts those who depended upon him. He is unable to maintain his subordinates, namely Uriah, he cannot manage his patron's funds, and he nearly ruins his daughters marriage prospects. Similarly, Mr. Murdstone, a middle-class man who makes his living preying on lovely widows, fails in his responsibility to David. Mr. Murdstone's business is run on child labor, and rather than providing an education for the young, he is dooming them to a miserable, ignorant existence.

Dickens's novels reflect his own attitudes towards society. Though he was born into a middle-class family, his life experiences familiarized him with the life of the lower-middle and working classes. His sympathy for their place in society is evident throughout his works, and through *David Copperfield* he seeks to address Victorian social ills which are grounded in this class system. In *David Copperfield*, Dickens revamps an old trope in order to reach out to a modern individual whose moral guidelines have been shaken. Dickens adapts Chaucer's method, the estates satire, in order to force society to examine the system.

## Conclusion

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens takes his readers on a pilgrimage, and he portrays David's life story in such a way that it hearkens to the medieval allegorical tradition. His characters parallel Chaucer's allegorical use of the Seven Deadly Sins within the framework for his *Canterbury Tales*. He places himself in a tradition, the *Bildungsroman*, which was influenced by the medieval allegory, and he utilizes tactics such as humors, physiognomy, and textual allusions in to enlighten his reader. His characterization techniques not only help the reader to remember these figures but, by drawing on these traditions, he also associates his characters with medieval allegorical types and specifically the Seven Deadly Sins.

Dickens's text does not instruct his audience, middle and working class reader, to merely turn their eyes inward to their own souls but also asks the Victorian reader to realize that reformation happens not when we are locked away from one another in our own small cells, convinced of our own moral superiority, but when we open our eyes to the problems of society. *David Copperfield* encourages readers to see that their sins are not merely personal vices. Dickens aids them in understanding that their failure is in accepting the established order. Consumed with their own personal ills, individuals neglect to see that they have failed in their duty to humanity, including those poor unfortunate creatures such as Little Emily, David, and Micawber's family.

Furthermore, the influence of Chaucer upon Dickens's *David Copperfield* is important in that it encourages awareness in both readers and critics of the text. We

should always seek to discover the influence of literary tradition upon the work of an author; these avenues of inquiry help to reveal both the impact and succession of literary traditions such as allegory and the agenda of the author within a text. Exploring such traditions will enable us to read *David Copperfield* in a new light and reflect on the greater impact that the medieval revival and the influx of medieval literature may have had upon Victorian authors and readers alike.

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## ABSTRACT

### DICKENS AND THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

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During the Middle Ages, authors of such works as *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales* employed allegorical characters and situations to correct problematic behavior through religious instruction; they utilized the behavior of flat allegorical figures to highlight individual sins and institutional problems in social behavior. More specifically, one can find the allegory of the Seven Deadly Sins appearing in literature throughout history. It is the aim of this text to illustrate the way that Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* is situated within allegorical tradition, and, particularly, it is the purpose of this study to examine the relation of Chaucer's use of allegory to Dickens's text.

Dickens' novel *David Copperfield* reflects the influence of medieval allegory, popularized by the morality play, in the English literary tradition, by employing an allegorical use of the Seven Deadly Sins parallel to Chaucer's and to use these allegorical figures to urge social and individual reform. Dickens's text also provides evidence of a connection to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; Micawber notes "For myself, My Canterbury Pilgrimage has done much" (*David Copperfield* 738). Throughout the pilgrimage, David learns to temper his emotions through his struggles with those Vices that he encounters,

and he comes to recognize, though he loved Steerforth, the imbalance that caused his hero's fall. This study compares textual evidence and examines the Victorian reader's familiarity with Chaucer and medieval allegory; these avenues of inquiry come together to bolster the notion that Dickens was indeed impacted by Chaucer's allegorical use of the Seven Deadly Sins.