Dialectics and Ideology in Dickens' *Dombey and Son*: Reification of the Mental Content

Mamoun F. I. Alzoubi[1], & Mohammed Ahmed Al-Abdulrazaq[2]

[1] Al-Balqa Applied University-Salt College for Humanities, Jordan

[2] Al-Balqa Applied University-Irbid University College, Jordan

Correspondence: Mamoun F. I. Alzoubi, Assistant Professor, Al-Balqa Applied University-Salt College for Humanities, Jordan.

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Abstract

The paper, relying on Marxist and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories, fosters several ways to apprehend non-mimetic characterization in Dickens' *Dombey and Son* by theorizing the ways in which aesthetic, political, historical ideologies articulate themselves in means of representation. Since the influence of the visual arts on the novel is central for my argument, this paper attempts to give substantial critical consideration to Dickens' representation of images and their double meaning that help understand social ideological relations in the bourgeois society. Visual representation, as a metaphor for the role of materiality in characterization throughout Dickens' work and the role of fetishes, depicts the reification of the subject under capitalism. Visualization technique captures the flux of shaping characters and their function in everyday life. This aesthetic technique has led to reevaluation of Dickens's use of visuals as a unique feature in fiction of the highest quality. Hence, representations of the inward life in fiction are merely linguistic approximations of something which cannot be wholly captured in language.

Keywords: Marxism, visual representation, materialism, humanities, Capitalism

1. Introduction

The paper attempts to examine the implications commodity-fetish and visual images using prominent visual images throughout Dickens' *Dombey and Son*. Some critics follow assertions that Dickens' characters are kinds of caricature rather than living individuals. Henry James (1981) criticizes Dickens' characterization, claiming that he has created nothing but inanimate figures detached from reality (p. 9). James (1981) adds that Dickens has no contribution to the comprehension of human character (p. 9). The criticism of Dickens' characterization is not accurate since the use of visual illustration in his fiction can be seen as an attempt of defacing the illusion implicit in portraiture. The visual representation is perhaps best expressed as invisible extension of inner qualities: the portrait not only supplies the missing piece in representation that allows it to hang together as a whole; it serves as is the missing piece of subjectivity (its assumed portrait as permanent and autonomous image) that allows it to achieve true autonomy by supplementing the real. As Lacan (1977) explains, the image "establish[es] a relationship between an organism and its reality," (p. 6) by allowing our identification with an image (an external experience of gestalt) to impose its coherence on our fragmented body image and "turbulent" internality. For Lacan, the mirror image symbolizes in the individual subject this period of reification of the "I" as metonymic of the self.

Walter Benjamin (1999) tries to clarify the relationship between caricature and commodity by supplement saying that "[i]f the commodity was a fetish, then Grandville was the tribal sorcerer" (p. 186). It may seem surprising that Benjamin provides the favored place of a "sorcerer" of the commodity to a caricaturist. The tribal sorcerer has the exclusive power of communicating with the secret source of the fetish-object; he unveils the fantastic spirit believed to be concealed in its sensuous form. Benjamin's analogy is founded on a previous analogy, established by Marx, between the commodity-object in the modern capitalist society, as object of exchange in the realm of production and the market, and the fetish-object in the primitive society, as object of worship in the realm of religion and magic. The implication of Benjamin's extension of the idea of the commodity-fetish is thus that if we make the assumption that modern society repeats this structure of fantasy or irrational beliefs of primitive society in a sublimated way, then we can trace a repetition not only of the worshiper who follows the fantasy blindly, but also of the sorcerer who materializes and gives expression to the fantasy.

For Marx, obsession with the commodity is a result of a necessary illusion at the heart of the capitalist system whereby the relation between individuals (the forces of production) appears as the relation between things (the market), or to put it differently, "in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things" (Marx 1992, pp. 164-5). This comparison shows that the object plays a double role: the particular object within a social structure and the emotional influence of that structure itself. The object is divided into exchange-value and use-value.

The exchange-value does not belong to the object. It is associated with it through displacement. The object has the sense of having a fantastic dimension that is different from its physical material:

> "The commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labor within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material … relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relations between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things." (Marx 1992, p. 165)

One might then ask how this necessary illusion has come about. The fetishistic aspect of the commodity-form results from a fundamental contradiction in the objective structure of which it is a part. That is, since labor is by definition social, the sum total of labor of any society is the sum total of its social product, and this production is itself the form of social relation.

2. Fetishism of Material Objects

This visual image of social representation seems to show at once a greater distance to and a greater attachment to the subject. It uses the subject only to depict "objective meanings" and contrasts it to "free representations" of the subject; the idea of the effigy in caricature might assist us to explain how this means of representation goes beyond the bourgeois practice of art in order to divulge its contradictions.

Visual images, a representation that substitutes the subject in absence, has two important connections for this discussion: one connects it to the unconscious attribution of animation to inanimate objects and links it to commodity-fetishism, and the other connects it to the primary position of the visual sign in the unconscious, characterized by an uncanny identification between sign and referent, and relates it to the primacy of a particular type of image. I will attempt to examine the implications commodity-fetish and visual images using prominent visual images throughout Dickens' (1997) *Dombey and Son.*

The main interest of Dickens' description lies precisely in what cannot easily be transferred from the verbal to the visual medium. Dickens, in this means of representation, brings forth the subtleties and implications of a resourceful prose style. This idea of the material substrate of the subject embodied in visual images finds more complex development in *Dombey and Son*. Qui1p battering the effigy of Kit finds subtler repetition in Major Bagstock, himself almost an automaton, jabbing at objects and images in lieu of people in dumb-shows of his unspoken motives:

> "'Granger, Sir,' said the Major, tapping the last ideal portrait [an image he drew in the dirt with his cane], and rolling his head emphatically, was the Colonel of ours; a de-vilish handsome fellow, Sir, of forty-one. He died, Sir, in the second year of his marriage.' The Major ran the representative of the deceased Granger through and through the body with his walking stick." (Dickens 1997, p. 282)

This scene is full of with objects that are at once animate and inanimate, that hold a ghostlike existence. Chesterton points out "[t]here are details in the Dickens descriptions … which he endows with demoniac life" (Chesterton 1935, p. 65). These objects—as a result of a kind of preconscious perception of them—have, upon repetition, been granted an excessive symbolic value, autonomy beyond the grasp of the perceiver. Having initiated synthetic verbal medium using paintings, Dickens constructs two types of perceptual fact which interlock across the surface of the work. He combines textual planes and shadow between planes to disperse the subject of the work. At the same time through an array of demonstrative clues, he builds up a visual element to make up for the gap in linguistic description; it serves as a language of description.

Also, Bunsby is a man of wood who is likened to a human bulkhead: "immediately there appeared coming slowly up above the bulk-head of the cabin, another bulk-head human, and very large—with one stationary eye in the mahogany face, and one revolving one, on the principle of some lighthouses" (Dickens 1997, p.323). The effigy serves a projection of the self in a form of identification with that object, just as "the specular image seems to be the threshold of the visible world" (Lacan 1977, p. 5). Bunsby's description, at once an investigation of the art of portraiture, is brought to life by the possibilities, potentials, and alternatives built into their language. They approximate actual sight not by accumulating details about Bunsby, but by reminding us effectively of the shifting, elusive nature of the visual image and of the tenuous connection between image and meaning. Dickens' representation of internal nature of Bunsby is most effective when it is least divergent from his visual representation of characters' relations.

But at the center of all of these visual characters is the effigy of the Wooden Midshipman, an inanimate yet central object in the novel, which is present from beginning to end. It appears in chapter headings, and often serves to establish transitions and association between scenes and characters. In order to understand the function of the Wooden Midshipman in *Dombey and Son*, one has to look for the central structuring metaphor of this novel. It is assumed that *Dombey and Son* has a central motif rather than a central metaphor: pride. In fact, the novel is structured by a representation of mirror reflections as an expression of the reproducibility and exchangeability the commodity introduces at the heart of bourgeois culture. Thus, at the end of a long passage describing the repossessed commodities in Mr. Brogley's pawnshop, Dickens presents a symbolic image that becomes a dominant emblematic metaphor of the novel, shaping the link between characters and things:

> "Of motionless clocks that never stirred a finger, and seemed as incapable of being successfully wound up, as the pecuniary affairs of their former owners, there was always great choice in Mr. Brogley's shop; and various looking-glasses, accidentally placed at compound interest of reflection and reflection, presented to the eye an eternal perspective of bankruptcy and ruin." (Dickens 1997, p. 114)

This representation evokes a mirroring that both multiplies (reflects) and breaks into component parts (refracts), just as caricature reflect and refract each other in and through the images of the objects they represent. Through the medium of pun, financial

affairs and clocks are both said to be "wound up," a condensation between objects (clocks) and humans (debtors) is established whereby, in a reversal that reflects the reversal between subject and object effected by the commodity. Here, the object stands for the owner. By the applying idea of "compound interest" to the reflected images of these subject-objects, Dickens extends the exchangeability of the subject for an object to propose the subject's vast reproducibility through the commodity. Mr. Brogley's shop can be viewed as superficial only if we fail to look beyond Dickens' direct descriptions of thought and feeling and to consider the kinds of inward life implicit in his visual presentation.

The pawnshop is the place where commodities are taken out of circulation at the cost of interest for the time they are withdrawn. That is, in the pawnshop time is changed into capital by turning the commodity into pure value in the contractual suspense of its use-value. The unmoving clocks, as substitutes for the broken debtors, reflect the reification of time. Lukacs (1971) points out that time follows structurally from the fetishization of the commodity: "time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from total human personality): in short, it becomes space" (p. 90). Stopped and broken clocks, representing the death of the individual or his petrifying abstraction, prevail throughout novel.

Though Phiz never illustrates Brogley's pawnshop, he does explain that Mr. Brogley's visit to Captain Cuttle's stock and trade shop is to take possession of his property if he does not pay off a bond that came into Brogley's possession. The visual representation is rich (overflowing, like Dickens' description of Brogley's shop) in iconic details. While Cuttle is being comforted by his friends as he contemplates his immanent financial ruin, Brogley is "catching up keys with loadstones, looking through telescopes, endeavoring to make himself acquainted with the use of the globes, setting parallel rulers astride on to his nose, and amusing himself with other philosophical transactions" (Dickens 1997, p.121). What is interesting, in the illustration, is the way in which Phiz transmits the reflection of the human-commodity relationship graphically. Phiz depicts Mr. Brogley in a gesture chosen from a number of gestures described by Dickens. Phiz's choice to illustrate the gesture of Brogley setting parallel rulers astride on to his nose turns out to be more significant than it seems.

In a later illustration, The Wooden Midshipman on the lookout, Phiz displaces Brogley's exact gesture of insouciant mockery of Cuttle's financial ruin onto the figure of the "Wooden Midshipman," perched defiantly outside the doorway of Cuttle's shop with his quadrant astride on his nose. Phiz makes this mirror reflection between man and commodity graphically unmistakable in the shape of the objects they hold (quadrant and ruler), and their matching posture and gesture. Phiz, therefore, establishes a bond between the two that is essential to the text and to understanding of the Midshipman's purpose in the novel.

The Wooden Midshipman, the central effigy of the narrative, generates irrepressible animations that present him as superior to the humans around him. This superiority is achieved due to his defiant refusal to remain inanimate and the superhuman detachment from mundane issues of life, death, and wealth: "with his quadrant at his round black knob of an eye, and his finger in its old attitude of indomitable alacrity, the midshipman ... absorbed in scientific pursuits, had no sympathy with worldly concerns" (Dickens 1997, p. 251). The midshipman's "intent on his own discoveries, and caring as little of what went on about him, terrestrially, as Archimedes at the taking of Syracuse," (Dickens 1997, p. 251) is also associated with Brogley through his philosophic indifference to the human aspect of the economic violence and destruction, surrounding the commodity culture, that he overlooks. But the way in which Phiz brings about a graphic association between the two gives us the key to recognizing the ontological implications of their identification: the illustration of the Midshipman's gesture mirroring Brogley's gesture marks the disappearance of Brogley from the text, as if Brogley himself were literally transformed into an object.

Therefore, the person who exchanges commodities for interest is exchanged for an object that embodies the fetishization of the commodity and its consequent power to reverse the relations between object and owner: though its owners are "attached" to the Midshipman, "no fierce idol with a mouth from ear, to ear, and a murderous visage made of parrot's feathers, was ever more indifferent to the appeal of its savage votaries, than was the midshipman to these marks of attachment" (Dickens 1997, p. 251). Brogley is transformed into an effigy of the structural economic violence concealed in his indifference and the objects of his shop and the grin of the Midshipman which masks the more savage grin of fetish with "mouth from ear to ear" and a "murderous visage." Yet the Midshipman makes a perfect effigy of the bourgeois rationalist spirit, with his indifference and his quadrant, a cool designed to quantify.

Having developed the central means of presentation of the novel, that of mirror reflections, and the importance of the central effigy, we are in a better position to read the image dedicated to the Midshipman, "The Wooden Midshipman on the Look-out". It illustrates the scene in which Florence Dombey and Susan Nipper visit Walter and Captain Cuttle before Walter is shipped off to sea by Dombey's firm as a direct result of the financial disturbance Brogley's bond causes Cuttle. The scene centers on a strange exchange of Florence's shoe for Florence herself:

> "But that ancient mariner [the midshipman] might have been excused his insensibility to the treasure [the shoes in the trunk] as it rolled away. For, under his eye at the same moment, acutely within his range of observation, coming full into the sphere of his startled and intensely wide-awake look-out, were Florence and Susan Nipper: Florence looking half into his face half timidly, and receiving the full shock of his wooden ogling!" (Dickens 1997, p.253)

The motifs of mirroring and doubling (reflection and refraction) in this visual image multiply frenziedly: working backward across the procession of figures Phiz depicts coming down the street, first the two young women, then two identical gentlemen in identical top-hats facing one another, then two horses (the position of their heads mirroring each other), and finally, leading off around the corner on to the

left, the backs of two gentlemen, one in black and one in white, side by side with identical hats. The narrative depicts the exchange of a (typically fetishistic) possession for its possessor (Florence's shoes for Florence) while its visual image depicts the exchange of a person who represents possessions for a possession that represents a person (Brogley the pawnbroker for the Midshipman). Between image and text, there is a reversed reflection of an exchange of fetish for flesh and flesh for fetish. Occurring on a threshold, the image of these transactions reflects the threshold both between subject and object. At both center and limit of this liminal visual representation is the Wooden Midshipman, himself a liminal figure that guards the doorway, like a magic spirit-object overseeing the threshold between the animate and the inanimate.

The presentation of the spell of the commodity that leads to human confusion and ruin established first in Brogley's shop expands throughout the novel and pervades all of its various milieus, but it is Carker, Dombey's manager and the villain of the novel, who embodies it in its broadest significance:

> "Undertakings have been entered on, to swell the reputation of the house for vast resources, and to exhibit in magnificent contrast to other merchants' houses, of which it requires a steady head to contemplate the possibly—a few disastrous changes of affairs might render them the probably—ruinous consequences. In the midst of the many transactions of the House, in most parts of the world: a great labyrinth of which only he has held the clue." (Dickens 1997, pp.719- 20)

Like the Wooden Midshipman, Carker, even more than Brogley, has the "steady head" to "contemplate" the mathematical "transactions" that will lead not only to Dombey's ruin, but to a "great labyrinth" of reverberations throughout the world. That is, the abstract reflection and refraction that underlies the structure of images as representations of the bourgeois society seems to find particular expression in the figure portrayed, which is what gives his character a sense of being over-charged and pictorial.

To put it differently, while Brogley is subjected to the commodity-form and its permutations in his embodiment of it, Carker possesses an uncanny power over the forces of capital. He holds the secret to the dizzying "labyrinth" he has spun, like a necromancer, out of figures. Brogley's transformation into an object, in the form of the Wooden Midshipman, then, is not the end of his metamorphoses: later he is reflected and refracted into the many "shabby vampires" who "over-run [Dombey's] house" in order to auction off his property after his financial ruin, all of them acting like so many replications of Brogley, "sounding the plate-glass mirrors with their knuckles, striking discordant octaves on the Grand Piano, drawing wet forefingers over the pictures ... opening and shutting all the drawers, balancing the silver spoons and forks" (Dickens 1997, p.775). Accordingly, once his property is transformed into commodities, Dombey's house is transformed into a large-scale replication of Brogley's shop.

The transpositions from human to object or material elements, and vice versa, which we have seen above affirm this. John Carey (1974) points out that Dombey himself is a kind of effigy:

> "[His] rigidity attracts much notice: he looks 'like a man of wood, without a hinge or joint in him', and turns his head in his neckcloth 'as if it were a socket.' Critics have taken this as a sign that he lacks human affection. Of course, he does. But the more pressing reason for his woodenness is that Dickens likes wooden men." (p.88).

Both of these explanations of Dombey's "woodenness" are ultimately unsatisfying: the idea that it indicates a lack of human emotion fails to account for the cumulative effect of the pervasive images of woodenness and effigy throughout the novel; the idea that it is only because Dickens "likes wooden men" simply posits the fact without offering any explanation for it.

Dickens' insistence on wooden and objectified characters in *Dombey and Son* (The Midshipman, Bunsby, Dombey, Carker, Edith, and Cleopatra) is not simply indicative of his predilection for wooden men, or even a result of his own attraction to their uncanny effect, but a formal means of subverting the bourgeois image of the subject by unmasking and distorting the illusions—like caricature. Dickens' representation of human figures takes itself as the target of its subversion. Dombey, therefore, is not simply wooden, but is a kind of irrational, unassimilable material substrate, a lifeless wooden figure, just as his name can be split into the words me and body.

He is a wooden effigy of a man, a material double of himself subject to symbolic inversions, like the inscription on the coffee-room window. Dombey is part of an ideologically subversive representational method that Dickens has brought to full fruition in *Dombey and Son* and has continued to develop till the end of his career. Dombey's ontological change is illustrated best in a rather brilliant inversion, whereby instead of "getting inside" Dombey's character, the narrator projects Dombey's consciousness onto a piece of furniture, using the sea as a means of effecting a visual and concrete composite of themes and images that might have otherwise constituted his innerness. In preparation for this inversion of his consciousness, the narrator surrounds Dombey with objects in the dining room that is:

> "[I]n colour dark brown, with black hatchments of pictures blotching the walls, and twenty four black chairs, with almost as many nails in them as so many coffins, waiting like mutes, upon the threshold of the Turkey carpet; and two exhausted negroes holding up two withered branches of candelabra on the sideboard, and a musty smell prevailing as if the ashes of ten thousand different dinners were entombed in the sarcophagus below it. The owner of the house lived much abroad... and the room had gradually put itself into deeper and still deeper mourning for him, until it was become so funereal as to want nothing but a body in it to be quite complete." (Dickens 1997, p. 401)

In this room, objects are animated, and a human occupant is absent. Imagined as an absent corpse, Dombey marks a certain externalized liminality, as if the very threshold of consciousness belonged to the world of things or to a space neither inside nor outside the subject.

Baudelaire describes his experience of entering Grandville's works in terms that could easily apply to the disturbing recalcitrance of household objects in *Dombey and Son*:

> There are some superficial spirits who are amused by Grandville; for my part, I find him terrifying ... When I open the door of Grandville's work, I feel a certain uneasiness, as though I were entering an apartment where disorder was systematically organized—where preposterous cornices were propped up against the floor, where the pictures showed their faces through an opticians distorting glass, where all the objects elbowed each other about obliquely, the furniture stood with its feet in the air, and the drawers slid inwards instead of out (Dickens 1997, p.181)

What Baudelaire visualizes is a world in which each object possesses some secret word, or spirit, every trinket a dreamlike symbolic place that is mockingly impervious. But, in Dickens' novel, the dining room lacks only one thing, Dombey, the central effigial character of the novel, who is introduced into the scene as a representation of the missing corpse:

> No bad representation of the body, for the nonce, in his unbending form, if not in his attitude, Mr. Dombey looked down into the cold depths of the dead sea of mahogany on which the fruit dishes and decanters lay at anchor: as if the subject of his thoughts were rising towards the surface one by one, and plunging down again. (Dickens 1997, pp. 414-15)

Dombey's "unbending" body, substituting for a dead body, has the quality of pure material double of itself. It has become dead letter: me-body. A long passage follows in which images of characters and scenes from Dombey's past rise and fall in the reflection of the mahogany table-top. The defiance to humanity is palpable: not only is Dombey wooden, his very consciousness is objectified in wood as something alienable from and external to his corpse-like body. Hence, Dickens exposes the reified consciousness by pushing the reification/objectification of the subject beyond all rational limits.

This scene, in which Dombey's consciousness is reflected in the mahogany table, indicates the key to another dimension of the symbolic importance of the replicated image. The reflection functions as a nodal point between subject and object, subverting the distinction between the two: as a reflected image the subject and the object are equivalent and exchangeable. Subjects are not only exchangeable with objects, but they are also ontologically indebted to them.

Thus when Dombey is financially ruined and sits watching his clock as the ruined debtors represented by their broken clocks in Brogley's shop, he equates the separation of his belongings from his ownership with the separation of his life from his body: "He might yet give up what his creditors had spared him ... and only sever the tie between him and the ruined house, by severing that other link" (Dickens 1997, p. 807). At this moment, Dombey catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror and sees "[a] spectral, haggard, wasted likeness of himself, brooded and brooded over the empty fireplace" (Dickens 1997, p. 807). For the next few paragraphs Dombey, in his dialectical despair, becomes split between material body and "spectral" image, or "likeness of himself." As in the previous scene, it is the reflection, the likeness, to which his thoughts are attached. Dombey seems in the position of spectator, not even allowed access to the thoughts of this representational double of him:

> "It was thinking that if blood were to trickle that way, and to leak out into the hall, it must be a long time going so far … When it had thought of this a long while, it got up again and walked to a fro with its hand in its breast. He glanced at it occasionally, very curious to watch its motions … Now it was thinking again! what was it thinking? … It sat down again, with its eyes upon the empty fireplace." (Dickens 1997, p. 808)

Only when Florence enters the room does his perspective seem to shift from the likeness back to himself as he "only saw his own reflection in the glass, and at his knees, his daughter" (*DS*, p.808). Writing, here, is visual. It is important to visualize the image in this scene which seems incomplete without their original visuals. Readers become conditioned that those representations are inseparable from the verbal text. These visuals always prove that they have an aim of justifying their integral presence.

Two other visual images from *Dombey and Son* of this tendency to push the bourgeois image of subjectivity past its limit are Cleopatra (Mrs Skewton) and Major Bagstock. Mrs Skewton is dismantled every evening like a marionette or an automaton. There is Cleopatra (Mrs Skewton), who is turned into a grotesque doll after her stroke. Cleopetra's specular relation to the effigy is thus a concrete metaphor for her narrative as a whole:

> "[T]he painted object shriveled underneath [her maid's] hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched dark eyebrows changed to scanty tufts of grey; the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous and loose; an old, worn, yellow, nodding woman, with red eyes, alone remained in Cleopatra's place huddled up, like a slovenly bundle, in a greasy flannel gown." (Dickens 1997, p. 380)

After her stroke, she is transformed into a mere puppet. Reduced to a "bundle," Cleopatra is a precursor of characters like the Smallweeds, but in the Smallweeds Dickens pushes the absurdity even further and removes even the pretenses of logic (her stroke) behind these dreamlike images. The visualization technique captures the flux of shaping characters and their function in everyday life. This aesthetic technique has led to the reevaluation of Dickens's use of visuals as a unique feature in fiction of the highest quality. Because all representations of the inward life in fiction are merely linguistic approximations of something which cannot be wholly captured in language, it seems inappropriate to suggest that one kind of representation is by definition more accurate or legitimate than another, or that there is a single, clearly conceived goal toward which all creators of fictional characters must aspire. Doubtless a careful rendering of

change and development is one very effective way of depicting personality, but visual representations as well have proven to be equally effective.

Moreover, Bagstock's character is pushed in the other direction, towards expansion, and the explosive: an "overfed Mephistopheles," he would fall into fits of silent reverie in which, for instance, "his whole form, but especially his face and head, dilated beyond all former experience; and presented to the dark man's view, nothing but a heaving mass of indigo. At length he burst into a violent paroxysm of coughing"(Dickens 1997, p. 127). Bagstock, the self-consumed, self-aggrandizing, self-satisfied sycophant with an insatiable appetite, seems to represent these characteristics visually. The hypothetical visual dimension of Bagstock, anathema to Dickens' characters allows speculations of success, about the motives, desires, and defining qualities as the reader would contemplate about those of Bagstock as a living being. In this viewpoint, characters that have visual dimensions have more realistic meaning than the one described in language. The visual dimensions transcend the limitations of the linguistic medium and enrich our apprehension of the finest fiction.

Bagstock turns into the material means of expressing the ideas he embodies almost to the point of bursting apart. This almost literal pressure on the boundaries of the individual is pushed all the way to the extreme in the spontaneous combustion of Krook. He is also associated with the visual image of the Wooden Midshipman and with that of Quilp's masthead in his "wide awake look," and his unsleeping gaze: "'Wide awake is old Joe—broad awake, and staring, Sir!' There was no doubt of this last assertion being true, and to a very fearful extent; as it continued to be during the greater part of that night" (Dickens 1997, p.127). It is as if, being himself a representation of effigy capable of all kinds of expressive distortions, he has no human need for sleep. In this case, the visualized characters become the products of such carefully controlled stylization and exaggeration, only because they are visual, do they in the end strike us as so real. Physically, they are often extraordinary because Dickens selects his details and his blank spots so judiciously, knowing equally well what to include and what to leave out, and because he infuses his language with an awareness of language's limitations as a descriptive medium.

3. Conclusion

As we have seen in the previous discussion, using visual images as a means of representation in Dickens' *Dombey and Son* reveals the uncanny return of the materiality of the object that decenters the position of the subject. Dickens uses the effigy with its implications as a means of representation to show hidden characteristics of the bourgeois for the purpose of subversion. Visualization can be perceived as image-doubles, phantoms, automatons—which is used to gain power, inflict violence on, or mourn an individual in his absence. Just as the comic and "philosophic" indifference of the Midshipman conceals the "fierce idol with a mouth from ear to ear, and a murderous visage," Carker's smooth and urbane smile covers up his savage teeth—"A cat, or monkey, or a hyena, or a death's-head, could not have shown the Captain more teeth at one time, than Mr Carker showed him at this period of their interview" (Dickens 1997, p. 229). Carker, therefore, is not a psychologically depicted capitalist, but a visual representation of the destructive and seductive powers of capital: a mask.

Dombey and Son's constellation of characters revolves around the reflection/refraction metaphor as the demonstration of the subject/material crisis represented in the commodity. The distortion allows the effigy to enter into an indefinite and endless process of proliferation. In the same way, the condensation of Brogley, the Midshipman, and Carker offers a symbolic illustration to the "reflection and refraction" of political and economic interactions between people and objects formed in Dickens' central metaphor. In other words, if the Wooden Midshipman is the manifestation of potencies concealed within the commodity-form reifying the very being of characters in the commodification that binds them in the capitalist system, then Carker is the living mask of hidden subversive forces of production relations.

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