ORALITY, LITERACY, AND CHARACTER
IN BLEAK HOUSE

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Jeffrey Charles Nelms, B.A.
Denton, Texas
May, 1988

This work argues that the dynamics of the oral and of the literate consciousness play a vital role in the characterization of *Bleak House*. Through an application of Walter Ong’s synthesis of orality/literacy research, Krook’s residual orality is seen to play a greater role in his characterization than his more frequently discussed spontaneous combustion. Also, the role orality and literacy plays in understanding Dickens’s satire of "philanthropic shams" is analyzed. This study concludes that an awareness of orality and literacy gives the reader of *Bleak House* a consistent framework for evaluating the moral quality of its characters and for understanding the broader social message underlying Dickens’s topical satire.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. BACKGROUNDS IN ORALITY AND LITERACY AND THEIR APPLICATIONS TO LITERARY ANALYSIS ........................................ 1

II. MORE THAN FIREWORKS: ORALITY, KROOK, AND THE COURT OF CHANCERY ........................................................... 22

III. ORALITY, LITERACY AND THE PHILANTHROPIC SHAM .......................................................... 49

IV. THE BROKEN MACHINE ........................................................................................................... 75

WORKS CITED ..................................................................................................................................................... 87
CHAPTER I

BACKGROUNDS IN ORALITY AND LITERACY AND THEIR APPLICATIONS TO LITERARY ANALYSIS

The works of Charles Dickens have never lacked a popular audience, mainly because of the vitality of his characters. Readers of Dickens's works may forget elements of his sometimes labyrinthine plots, and certainly contemporary readers will miss the point of much of Dickens's brilliant topical satire, but vivid images of his characters remain long after these other aspects fade from memory. But despite their tenacious hold on our consciousness, Dickens's characters have from the beginning of his career been labelled as "flat" caricatures, holdovers from the classical humoral tradition, as "the conventional . . . dummies of melodrama" (Cecil 26). Even critics who praise Dickens's work do so in an ambivalent fashion:

many flat characters, like those of Dickens, are not only felt as very much "alive" but also create the impression of depth (Rimmon-Kenan 40);
Truth to life is not . . . what we normally expect from a Dickens novel, unless it be truth to the life of the imagination (Churchill 135);
Dickens's way of character creation was not that of the realist novelist; he was after another kind of reality. (Allen 184)

Seemingly, Dickens's characters must not be seen as "complex" or as connected with conventional "reality." Like marionettes, Dickens's characters are often seen as colorfully wooden captives of his melodramatic authorial fiats.

One aim of this work is to discuss one way in which Dickens's characters are individualized by showing how the characterization in one of Dickens's greatest novels, Bleak House, reflects the tremendous rise in literacy in the 19th century, and the consequent effects of that rise on the psychology of the individual. Specifically, I intend to apply facets of the research done by social scientists and linguists on the nature of orality and literacy as synthesized by Walter J. Ong in his Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word, to the characterization in Bleak House. In so doing, I shall concentrate on Krook, the macabre little man who spontaneously combusts in chapter 32 of Bleak House, and on those characters who constitute the "philanthropic sham" (Ikeler 498)--especially Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Pardiggle, and Mr. Chadband. To date, analyses of Mr. Krook have centered on his representative function as a literary analogue for the Lord High Chancellor of the Court of Chancery. Viewing Krook in such a manner does indeed render him a puppet, whose motivations are not those of
thinking, breathing human beings, but are instead dictated by
the necessities of Dickens’s fiction, forcing Krook to be
seen as merely a paper man. Of course, in one sense, all
literary characters are "puppets" of their authors; they are
all subject to the author’s needs. But when a character is
extracted from the human lifeworld and reduced to a mere cog
in the machinery of the text, he becomes flatly mechanical,
and as such, does not usually have the vibrancy of most of
Dickens’s characters. Orality-literacy studies can explain
Krook’s identification with the Lord Chancellor in a more
satisfying way than do the formal requirements of Dickens’s
fiction.

Another issue I shall address is the common indictment
of Dickens’s novels that they are "baggy"—tangled with
superfluous plot lines and populated with nonessential
characters. A. Abbott Ikeler has addressed this problem in
Bleak House in his examination of the "philanthropic sham"—
the collection of ineffectual professional do-gooders in
Bleak House: Mr. Chadband, Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Pardiggle,
Mr. Quale, Mr. Gusher, and Miss Wisk. Ikeler maintains that
in his portrayal of the many faces philanthropy assumed in
his day, Dickens was trying to correct "popular
misconceptions about humbug philanthropists" (Ikeler 506) by
presenting "the essential villainy of the breed . . . the
common denominator of vanity and exploitation" (Ikeler 506).
The high population of philanthropists in the novel is,
according to Ikeler, Dickens’s way of creating a "highly
differentiated understanding of his society" (511) and results also from Dickens's "linear notion of character . . . rooted in Fielding, Smollett, and the Comedy of Humors tradition" (512). While I agree with Ikeler in the main, I think orality-literacy studies can be useful here because they can help establish a framework which differentiates among the Bleak House philanthropists on the basis of their manipulation of oral and written communication strategies, and the consequent maliciousness or misguidedness of their motives.

How exactly can orality-literacy studies help in a literary analysis of Dickens's work? Research in the field of orality and literacy indicates that living in a predominantly oral or predominantly literate community can profoundly affect the individual, as well as the nature of one's culture. By using this research as a basis for analysis, we can gain new insights into the psychodynamics of the characters in Dickens's novels, novels which are set in a society that was greatly affected by the rise of its newfangled widespread literacy.

I will first introduce the terminology and the theoretical insights concerning orality and literacy that are most relevant to this discussion. Numerous terms (e.g., "preliterate," "quasi-literate," "literatti") have been applied to the various stages in the progression from complete orality to complete literacy. This proliferation of terms reflects an attempt to nail down precise increments
on what is in fact a continuum, bounded by complete literacy on one end and total orality on the other. In any such conceptual framework, it is commonly accepted that the terms defining the polar ends may represent theoretical extremes, not actually applying to any living person or culture: "no individual is either 'oral' or 'literate'" (Tannen 3). Just as writing does not simply replace talking (but instead supplements it and hence requires its own rules for transmission), one does not simply stop being "oral" and suddenly become "literate." The terms "oral" and "literate" are adopted, however, so that generalizations can be made concerning the degree to which people use oral and literate communication strategies as determined by their degree of exposure to literacy. Primary orality (one end of the continuum) may be defined, quite simply, as "that of persons totally unfamiliar with writing" (Ong, Orality 6). Literacy (the other end of the continuum), is less easy to define. Goody and Watt, in fact, claim that "there is no agreement . . . about what the actual boundary lines between non-literate and literate cultures are" (27). And David Olson has argued that we have always lacked a single definition of literacy which can be consistently applied to different cultures, or to the same culture in different times (370-71). Since the medieval period, definitions of literacy have ranged from the ability to read and write Latin (Bauml 238) to the ability to recite, but not necessarily comprehend, a familiar text, to the ability to sign one’s name, to the
modern view that literates should have "the ability to read a complex text with literary allusions and metaphoric expression and not only to interpret this text but to relate it sensibly to other texts" (Olson 370). For my purposes, I shall loosely define literacy as the ability to employ the written word to comprehend and manipulate culturally essential knowledge.

In between the two extremes of orality and literacy are a vast number of "elusive intermediate levels" (Bauml 239). Rather than attempt to categorize these intermediate levels, I shall adopt the term "residual orality" offered by Walter J. Ong; he defines residual orality as "habits of thought and expression tracing back to preliterate situations or practice, or deriving from the dominance of the oral as a medium in a given culture, or indicating a reluctance or inability to disassociate the written medium from the spoken" (Ong, Rhetoric 25-26). The concept of residual orality is useful because no two persons will exhibit identical degrees of orality and literacy, and placing subjects in prescribed categories can obscure or ignore important, yet subtle, distinctions. Furthermore, any thorough analysis of an individual's orality or literacy will completely examine the residue of oral strategies in his or her thought and expression; this approach allows for a discussion of degrees of residual orality, rather than inaccurate or misleading labels.
A knowledge of the basic differences between the two forms of communication and of the consequences of these differences is necessary in order to understand how orality-literacy studies can be applied to literature. The differences between spoken and written communication stem from the medium of their presentation and of their perceptual consequences. The spoken word is sounded, and thus ephemeral; the content of speech survives its utterance only in the memory of its hearers. Thus, an oral community is constrained by the limitations of the human memory to "code" what it wishes to remember in forms which aid recall. Also, speech requires an immediately present audience, and the presence of an audience implies interpersonal contact. These two elements—mnemonic constraints and interpersonal contact—require oral thought and expression to assume certain characteristic forms. Ong cites the following formal characteristics of oral thought in his chapter "The psychodynamics of orality."

1. **Additive rather than subordinative.** We speak about ten times faster than we write (Chafe 36); consequently, we have neither the time, nor the opportunity to revise substantially the content of our speech. Thus, speech often lacks "the analytic, reasoned subordination that characterizes writing" (Ong, *Orality* 37).

2. **Aggregative rather than analytic.** To make people and events more memorable, oral communities describe them in
"formulary" expressions and clusters of epithets (what literates would call cliche's).

3. **Redundant or copious.** The ephemerality of speech prohibits "re-reading" or "looking up," which can be done with a written text. When speaking, "redundancy, repetition of the just-said keeps both speaker and hearer surely on the track" (Ong, *Orality* 40).

4. **Conservative or traditionalist/Homeostatic.** Oral formulary expressions inhibit intellectual experimentation because new knowledge may not conform to established categories; hence, "oral societies must invest great energy in saying over and over again what has been learned arduously over the ages. This need establishes a highly traditionalist or conservative set of mind" (Ong, *Orality* 41). This traditionalist outlook, though, is completely subservient to the oral community's present cultural values. Because mnemonic constraints enforce a strong mental economy which cannot support superfluous information, "oral societies live very much in a present which keeps itself in equilibrium or homeostasis by sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance" (Ong, *Orality* 46). In the same vein, the lexicon of an oral community seldom contains words with many multiple meanings: "the meaning of each word is controlled ... by the real-life situations in which the word is used here and now" (Ong, *Orality* 47).

5. **Close to the human lifeworld/Situational rather than abstract/Empathetic and participatory rather than**
objectively distanced. The interpersonal element of speech gives it a human, subjective nature which encourages the structuring of knowledge "with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld" (Ong, Orality 42). Abstract thinking requires "leaving" the human lifeworld; that is, it means establishing a fictional context outside of everyday reality: "oral cultures tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld" (Ong, Orality 49). The interpersonal context of the speech act also requires a participatory and cooperative spirit between interlocutors. Nonverbal cues, for instance, enable the speaker both to elicit responses and to evaluate them; a questioning look, raised eyebrows, and extended palms are but a few of the ways in which speakers can measure their audiences' reception of their contribution. Such two-way communication between author and audience is, of course, not possible with written communication.

6. Agonistically toned. Oral cultures tend to develop highly polarized perspectives because polarities are easily assimilated by the mind; it is easier to describe and to recall a hero and a villain, for instance, than those who fall somewhere in between. Ong refers to this tendency of oral thought as its "agonistic" tendency (43-45) because the mnemonic requirements of the oral mind foster a dichotomous view of the world in which opposites contend for dominance. This agonism is reflected on one hand by the almost universal
presence of vituperative name-calling contests in oral cultures (Ong, Orality 44), and, on the other hand by "the fulsome expression of praise which is found everywhere in connection with orality" (Ong, Orality 45).

This list of characteristics is by no means exhaustive; it is intended only to provide a sense of some of the typical distinctions between spoken and written language, and of some of the consequences for thought and expression of living in an orally grounded community.

With the invention of writing, thought undergoes changes which reflect the different nature of the new expressive medium:

the written word is fixed . . . the written word . . . exists independently of the writing writer and the reading reader; all or any part of a written text is available in any sequence to anyone with access to it; its arrangement is spatial, lending itself to organization in terms of symbolic systems extraneous to its content, such as the alphabet or numbers. Accordingly, the rhetorical means of "storing" a written text in the memory are likewise spatially organized systems, in which concepts such as topos, locus communis, and architectonic structures play a considerable role. (Bauml 25)

Indeed, the fixity of a written text is its most important characteristic. The fixity of writing "suggests an ideal of definable truths which have an inherent autonomy and
permanence quite different from the phenomena of the temporal flux and of contradictory verbal usages" (Goody and Watt 53).

This autonomy results from the necessity of the direct relationship between symbol and referent which exists in written language. Writing requires this direct relationship because it lacks the full experiential context that speech always has. In oral communication "possible confusions or misunderstandings can always be cleared up by question and answer" (Goody and Watt 51); writing must develop a complex, ordered syntax to avoid possible ambiguity, where necessary. David Olson, in fact, argues that as cultures become more and more dominated by literate communication, a transition occurs which "can be described as one of increasing explicitness, with language increasingly able to stand as an unambiguous or autonomous representation of meaning" (258). This autonomy or explicitness removes, to some degree, the locus of meaning from the shared knowledge of oral communities to the form of logical, coherent argument (Olson 277, Tannen 2, Hildyard and Olson 20) and separates the knower and the known--in a sense divorcing human beings from their natural world.

The consequences of the shift to literacy for both culture and the individual are profound and widespread. For the individual, the ability to store information in a written text frees the mind from pedestrian mnemonic chores and allows it time for self-reflection and contemplation. This freedom, in turn, encourages the type of abstract thinking which has led to our great advances in scientific and philosophical
thinking. But literacy also affects the individual in less positive ways. For instance, because writing indiscriminately preserves cultural elements, literate culture "leaves more to its members . . . it gives more free play to the individual" (Goody and Watt 63). This "free play," though, can isolate individuals from their culture. The vastness of the recorded cultural repertoire prohibits the individual "from participating fully in the total cultural tradition to anything like the extent possible in non-literate society" (Goody and Watt 57) and "fosters the alienation that has characterized so many writers and philosophers of the West since the last century" (Goody and Watt 57-58). With respect to literature, Bauml notes that with the evolution of literacy, written "narrative changes its communicative function from commenting on 'reality' to constituting a 'reality'" (265). In the twentieth century, this change is seen in reified form in the development of the psychological novel, which creates its own "inner" world, and in another form in the rise of science fiction, which creates its own "outer" world.

Furthermore, on the one hand, written records can lead to an unthinking reliance on the integrity of printed texts. The pervasiveness of this attitude is reflected in such popular metaphorical sayings as "going by the book" (as if the "book" were a final authority) and "it's there in black and white" (as if the mere fact of being in print can make something true). But on the other hand, the existence of
written records can also encourage a more critical attitude towards notions of the world and of history (Goody and Watt 48). To question history in an oral culture requires one to contend with a "living text," in the person of a speaker. In literate cultures, one can more easily question records of the past because a written text can never argue; as mentioned above, logical argument precedes truth in literate cultures, and effective rhetoric becomes the source of truth. A sceptical attitude, in turn, leads to the development of logical methods which can be used to prove premises. Literacy, then, can be seen as a major cause of "the predominant features of Western culture and for our distinctive ways of using language and our distinctive modes of thought" (Olson 278).

In terms of effects on culture, the alienating nature of writing is in many ways its most influential force. For instance, Goody has shown that when the written mode achieves a dominant cultural position, the result is a systematic devaluation of, not so much the oral register itself (we understand that we have to speak to each other, and that we have to speak well to influence others), but of those tasks and experiences that do not require an advanced level of literate skill and . . . of forms of knowledge that are not acquired through books, or anyhow not from specialists in book learning . . . or not at least in those places uniquely devoted
to book learning . . . that is, the schools and universities. (Goody 201-202)

This devaluation is augmented by the fact that, historically, the upper classes are the first to acquire literacy and manipulate it for their ends. Social hierarchies, then, are encouraged by "the high degree of differentiation in exposure to the literate tradition" which "sets up a basic division which cannot exist in a non-literate society" (Goody and Watt 59).

Of course, there are many other causes of the individual psychologies and the social milieux described. My intention is not to credit literacy solely with causing these developments; obviously more complex political, technological and philosophical factors have their place in the history of Western thought. I intend only to communicate some of the ways in which literate thinking has been seen to influence behavior and expression. I should also like to repeat here that the characteristics of literacy just discussed represent prototypes--no purely "oral" or "literate" person exists in a literate society; furthermore, "writing is clearly an addition, not an alternative, to oral transmission" (Goody and Watt 68) -- that is, it does not supplant oral thinking, but instead alters it.

To date, much of the research on the differences between orality and literacy has been done by social scientists and linguists, and the variety of their applications suggests the rich, untapped potential of orality-literacy studies. The
following few examples should communicate the range of disciplines to which this research can be applied. In the field of psychoanalysis, J.C. Carothers has used his study of the effects of the introduction of literacy into primary oral cultures in Africa to explore the role literacy plays "in shaping the minds of men and the patterns of their mental breakdown" (307). In sociology, Jack Goody and Ian Watt have also studied the effects of literacy on primary oral cultures in an effort to explain how shifts in human consciousness which have previously been labelled as shifts from "savage" to "domesticated" or from "prelogical" to "rational" can be more accurately explained as shifts from orality to various stages of literacy. In the area of law, Helmut Esau has used his knowledge of the differences in oral/literate discourse to argue that transcripts of oral conversations used in the Watergate trials may have been incorrectly interpreted by juries (thus biasing their verdict) because their understandings of taped conversations were based on written transcripts which do not accurately reflect the nature of real human conversation (as opposed to the "cleaned up" conversation usually presented in fiction). In discourse analysis, both Deborah Tannen and Wallace Chafe have analyzed how literacy affects modern literate speakers' written and spoken language in contexts ranging from informal conversation to formal academic writing. Finally, from an interdisciplinary perspective, David R. Olson contends that "the controversial aspects of five issues--the structure of
language, the nature of comprehension, the nature of logical reasoning, and the problems of learning to speak and learning to read" (262) can all be traced to differing assumptions about the primacy of spoken or written language.

Literary critics have, to this point, not fully exploited what orality-literacy studies offer them. Writing of literary history, Ong states that it

still proceeds with little if any awareness of orality-literacy polarities, despite the importance of these polarities in the development of genres, plot, characterization, writer-reader relationships, and the relationship of literature to social, intellectual and psychic structures. (Orality 157)

Ong further demonstrates that orality-literacy studies have direct implications for several schools of literary criticism, including New Criticism, Russian formalism, structuralism, deconstructionism, and speech-act and reader-response theory. But despite the overall neglect of orality-literacy studies by literary scholars, some have achieved significant results. David Barrow, for instance, has used the orality/literacy framework to support a reading of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* which develops a concept of heroism based on Huck's conscious control of his literacy in a highly residually oral milieu. Barrow's work is particularly insightful in its explanation of the highly criticized ending of Twain's novel. Another successful application is John G. Bayer's analysis of the role of the American oral tradition
in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Bayer has shown that the scaffold scenes in *The Scarlet Letter* "are charged with the existential dynamics of speech" (263), and, further, that the complete function of the "Custom-House" prologue emerges clearly when examined in the light of oral communication strategies.

It is no coincidence that Barrow's and Bayer's work, as well as this work, concern 19th century authors. For the 19th century, both in England and in America, was the century which saw the greatest increase in recorded literacy rates in history. From 1841 to 1900, the national literacy rates for adults in England "rose from 67 per cent (male) and 51 per cent (female) . . . to approximately 97 per cent for both sexes" (Altick 60). The definition of literacy upon which these figures are based is the ability to sign one's name in the Anglican Marriage Register, and while this method may not seem an accurate way to gauge the extent of someone's literacy, R.S. Schofield contends that this test "satisfies almost all the requirements of a universal, standard and direct measure" (319) because of the way English schools taught. Until late in the century, the curricula of most British schools were "so phased that reading was taught first, then writing, and lastly arithmetic" (Schofield 316). Thus, the ability to sign one's name, at that time, signified more than the mere ability to form the letters of one's name--it signified at least a rudimentary ability to read. Still, the schools available to the lower classes (often
schools connected with workhouses or schools designed solely for vocational training) seldom provided much instruction beyond the ability to read simple passages and, even at that, few families could afford to send their children to school for very long.

Because of the differences in the quality of schooling available to the lower classes and the different ages at which children would leave schools, Englishmen comprised a wide variety of levels of literacy. But no matter what level of literacy one attained, society encouraged a still greater mastery of the written word. In 19th century England, the idea of "self-help," based on the ability to read, flourished; literacy was seen as "the key to betterment" (Klingopulos 26), and to the Victorians "the printing press driven by a steam engine was, indeed, the most pregnant emblem of their achievement and aspirations" (Altick 64).

The rise of the literacy rates cited above can probably be traced to the general improvement in living conditions which occurred throughout the 19th century. In the first half of the century, however--the fictional time of Bleak House (Ford and Monod xix)--many factors conspired to keep literacy rates low. To begin with, the majority of the population spent most of their day earning a living, and when they came home, "living conditions were anything but conducive to the reading habit. Long hours of strenuous work . . . . Crowded rooms . . . . insufficient light, poor
eyesight caused in part by nutritional deficiencies" (Altick 61) all combined to further stifle the desire to read.

Money, too, was also an inhibiting factor. During the first half of the 19th century, "books were something of a luxury item" (Altick 65), although serialization, which was crucial to Dickens's own success, would substantially reduce the price of books to those with low incomes. Finally, as in our own day, reading competed with other popular forms of contemporary entertainment: "music halls, cheap theaters, sporting matches, choral societies, entertainments at church or chapel, public parks, railway excursions" (Altick 61) also combined to keep the public from reading.

Still, the 19th century saw the rise of the largest literate audience in English history to that time, albeit this reading public "was never homogeneous" (Webb 198), but comprised "a whole cluster of publics, as various as the society to which they belonged" (Altick 59). Literature in every form from the penny dreadfuls and shilling shockers to the triple-decker novels sprang up to suit every level of reader. The Victorian Age was also the great age of English periodicals: "the magisterial quarterly reviews, the Whig Edinburgh (founded 1802), its rival the Tory Quarterly (1809), and the Benthamite Westminster (1824)" all enjoyed "circulations which, in proportion to the size of the reading public, were much greater than any comparable periodical can boast today" (Altick 66). In addition to these reviews, monthly magazines, such as Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine
(1817), and Fraser's Magazine (1830) were created. They were joined, in the forties and fifties, "by weekly papers addressed to a wider 'family' audience" (Altick 67), whose titles included Punch (1841), Household Words (1850), and its successor All the Year Round, the latter two for which Dickens wrote and edited. The preponderance of so many diverse forms of written expression, and the strong Victorian faith in the power of literacy to enact social and moral change attest to the fact that 19th century English society was wrestling with the newly-widespread literacy of its members. This tension is what makes orality-literacy studies so relevant to the work of Charles Dickens. Given his unique powers of describing people, especially the lower and middle classes, and his ability to create vast panoramas of English society [what Edgar Johnson refers to as an "anatomy of society (769)"], Dickens is an artist we should naturally expect to be a chronicler of the confrontation of the vast new literate community in England and still large residually oral community.

In the remainder of this work, I propose to analyze in depth those characters in Bleak House which I consider to be the most enlightening examples of persons at various points on the orality-literacy continuum. Mr. Krook is an especially useful subject for this examination because scarcely any criticism has been written on the subject of his residual orality, which is, in many ways, a much more interesting side of his characterization than his
often-commented upon spontaneous combustion. Furthermore, viewing Krook in terms of his residual orality will allow us to see how Krook transcends his popular image as merely a one-dimensional analog of the Lord Chancellor.

Where our discussion of Krook will allow me to discuss many of the elements of residual orality, our look at the characters involved in the philanthropic sham will let me analyze ways in which literate individuals can consciously and unconsciously abuse their literate communicative strategies. Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle, I will show, are in reality dupes of the kind of abstract thinking that literacy can cause. Mr. Chadband, on the other hand, will be seen to be perfectly conscious of the ways in which he perverts language for his own selfish ends.

Finally, I hope to examine some brief examples of characterization in *Bleak House* where instances of writing and speaking play an important part, in an effort to show the pervasiveness of the orality-literacy theme in the novel and to discuss what this pervasiveness says about Dickens's attitude toward the uses and abuses of written and spoken language in his time.
CHAPTER II

MORE THAN FIREWORKS: ORALITY, KROOK, AND THE COURT OF CHANCERY

In Bleak House, Krook, the incendiary rag and bottle shop owner, is associated with the Lord Chancellor of the Court of Chancery in several ways. For instance, in the following selections, Flite, Guppy, and the omniscient narrator, respectively, refer to Krook as the Lord Chancellor:

He is called among the neighbours the Lord Chancellor (50);
I think you know Krook, the Chancellor, across the lane? (251);
The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts . . . (403)

For the reader of Bleak House, the identification of Krook as the Lord Chancellor by other characters would probably be sufficient to establish him as an analog of the Lord Chancellor. But if that were not sufficient, the omniscient narrator’s repeated references to Krook as "Lord Chancellor," and to the similarities between Krook’s shop and the Court of Chancery would certainly drive the point home. Significantly,
however, Krook himself personally identifies with the Lord Chancellor:

I go to see my noble and learned brother pretty well every day, when he sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice him. There's no great odds betwixt us. We both grub on in a muddle (51);

I persuaded him to go to the tavern over the way there, t'other side my lane (I mean Chancery Lane) .

. . (52);

"Hi!" said the old man. "You know I am the Chancellor."

"Well?" returned Miss Flite. "What of that?"

"For the Chancellor," said the old man, with a chuckle, "not to be acquainted with a Jarndyce is queer, ain't it, Miss Flite?" (180)

There is no denying that Krook's literary identity is framed by his association with the Lord Chancellor, but there is much more to his character than a satire on Chancery practices.

In an analysis of Dickens's method of characterization, Elizabeth Langland has stated that in Dickens's works "characters often spring to life in contexts that individualize rather than reinforce their representative natures so that even a Sir Leicester can transcend the class values of his condition" (72). But exactly how are these contexts created in Dickens's works? Langland states: "The answer lies in a direction other than that of their representative functions" (70). I think the context which
allows Krook to transcend his representative function in \textit{Bleak House} can best be described by applying some of the finer distinctions of the psychology of orality/literacy discussed in chapter 1 to his grappling with and consequent fetishizing of the printed word.

Krook's characterization is enthralling; besides Esther Summerson, no other single character in \textit{Bleak House} has elicited as much scholarship as Krook has. But despite his intriguing behavior, Krook is remembered by the readers of \textit{Bleak House} almost solely for his incandescent adieu in chapter 32. Concentrating on this aspect alone limits the importance of Krook, thus failing to do justice to Dickens's art, and ignores what is easily the most important of Krook's traits--his struggle with literacy and his fetishizing of the printed word. The other common critical approach to viewing Krook--only for his role as literary analog for the Lord Chancellor--is also unnecessarily limiting. Indeed, it is curious that critics have largely ignored Krook's illiteracy since so many of Krook's contributions in \textit{Bleak House} depict his futile attempts to read. In fact, as Elizabeth Langland argues, Krook's illiteracy only partially relates him to the Chancery satire; a far smaller fraction of his characterization is devoted to this purely symbolic function than to the more representative aspect of his character:

Krook's suspicious illiteracy reflects only obliquely on the Lord Chancellor and the legal profession represented by such language merchants as
Conversation Kenge. Indeed, if Krook is representative of institutional behavior, he, like, Sir Leicester Dedlock, is also individualized in ways that exceed his representative qualities. (Langland 72)

In this selection, Langland claims that an element of Krook’s character that is usually associated with Krook’s relationship to the Lord Chancellor actually allows him to transcend that association and assume an identity distinct from his role of analog. Langland also goes on to say that even though Krook’s spontaneous combustion does play a major symbolic role in *Bleak House*, the phenomenon is but a small part of the picture we receive of Krook, as is his representative function as symbol of the Lord Chancellor: "Krook represents the Lord Chancellor—we are explicitly told so--yet he is memorable for the jealous guarding of his documents and his narrow suspicion that, should someone teach him to read, ‘they might teach me wrong!’" (71-72).

Krook’s force of character extends far past the bounds of his role as a topical analog, yet, a review of the literature shows that critical attention to Krook concentrates exclusively on his representative function and on his spontaneous combustion. The following summaries of critical work on Krook are characteristic of conventional approaches to him. Gordon S. Haight and E. Gaskell, for example, have each discussed Dickens’s attempts to verify the accuracy of his presentation of spontaneous combustion. Elizabeth Wiley and
George Perkins have each considered possible literary antecedents for Dickens’s description of Krook’s death, while Joseph Frank and Aida Parrag have compared Dickens’s use of spontaneous combustion to, respectively, similar presentations by Shaw and Zola. Joseph Brogunier has analyzed Krook’s death and found it to be a Carlylean call to action for legal reform, and, finally, Janice Nadelhaft has placed Krook in a larger symbolic frame in *Bleak House*, that of the pervasive imagery of the humoral spleen, and its connotations of lethargy, ennui, and gradual wasting. Most of these scholars have made important contributions to the analysis of Krook’s death, but each of these scholars has concentrated on only one aspect of Krook’s characterization: his spontaneous combustion.

I think a crucial and critically untouched side of Krook can be uncovered by applying some finer distinctions of orality and literacy theory, especially as discussed by Walter Ong in his *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, to demonstrate the extent of Krook’s orality and the limits of his literacy. From that point, I will enlist the discussion of anxiety in Rollo May’s *The Meaning of Anxiety*, and the discussion of transference in Ernest Becker’s *The Denial of Death* to prove that Krook’s personal identification with the Lord Chancellor and the Court of Chancery manifests his frustration in unsuccessfully trying to interiorize literacy.
In chapter 1 we saw that the great importance of mnemonic processes in an oral culture dictates not only what kinds of information are stored, but also how that information is stored. Research into mnemonic processes reveals that when listening, people tend to recall "important structural information and forget irrelevant detail" (Hildyard and Olson 19; emphasis added). Thus, we can expect efficient oral thought and expression to use those structures of discourse which most greatly facilitate recall. The classic example of the oral dependence on structures or formulas is, of course, the Iliad and the Odyssey, of which "virtually every distinctive feature . . . is due to the economy enforced on it by oral methods of composition," specifically the Greek hexameter line (Ong, Orality 21). In order for an oral mind to recall a large body of knowledge, that knowledge must be structured

in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero's "helper," and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form. Serious thought is intertwined with memory systems. (Ong, Orality 34)
Consequently, when a nonliterate speaker recalls information, he expresses it in the same form in which he "recorded" it, in the forms demanded by the oral memory: "Mnemonic needs determine even syntax" (Ong, *Orality* 34). Krook's syntax, as we shall see, exhibits a preponderance of characteristically oral structures because of his extensive residual orality. Of course, as previously pointed out, both literate and oral individuals use oral strategies in their conversations. Literate speakers, however, frequently use syntactic structures which they have learned from reading; their experience with literate texts "fosters the ability to 'speak a written language'" (Olson 271). One index of a person's residual orality, then, is the degree to which oral and literate conversational strategies are found in his speech. The following extract of Krook's speech contains virtually all of the oral strategies or "formulaic" (Ong, *Orality* 23ff, Tannen 1ff) expressions mentioned above.

"You see I have so many things here," he resumed, holding up the lantern, "of so many kinds, and all, as the neighbours think (but they know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that's why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that comes to my net. And I can't abear to part with anything once I lay hold of (or so my neighbours think, but what do
they know?) or to alter anything, or to have any
sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing
going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill
name of Chancery. I don't mind. I go to see my noble
and learned brother pretty well every day, when he
sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice
him." (50-51)

In this selection, we see many rhythmic, balancing
phonological and syntactic devices: alliteration--"rack and
ruin," "parchmentses and papers"; rhyme--"rust and must";
syntactic parallelism through antithesis--"He don't notice me,
but I notice him"; a succession of infinitives "to part," "to
alter," "to have"; parallel noun phrases--"so many things,"
"so many kinds"; and parallel gerund phrases--"nor scouring,"
"nor cleaning," "nor repairing." The "and's" introducing the
four independent clauses also contribute to the rhythm of
Krook's speech, giving those clauses a refrain-like quality.
But the "and's" also demonstrate another aspect of oral
syntax. Because writing lacks the rich experiential context of
speech, writing must rely more heavily on precise syntax; oral
structures, rather, rely on the pragmatics of the speaker
(Ong, Orality 37). Thus, Krook's oral syntax lacks the sort
of "analytic, reasoned subordination" (Ong, Orality 37),
through subordinate conjunctions that characterizes writing
and demonstrates the sequence of clauses linked merely by
"and" so typical of oral syntax.
Oral language, then, tends "not to be so much simple integers as clusters of integers, such as parallel terms or phrases or clauses" (Ong, *Orality* 38). Such parallel constructions abound in Krook's speech. But one other particularly striking example of parallel phrasing by Krook—his recounting of Tom Jarndyce's description of Chancery—illustrates another tendency of orality-based speech: the tendency to ground abstractions in concrete experience. In chapter 5, Krook relates the following speech of Tom Jarndyce:

"'For,' says he [Tom Jarndyce], 'it's being ground to bits in a slow mill; it's being roasted at a slow fire; it's being stung to death by single bees; it's being drowned by drops; it's going mad by grains.'" (52)

The structure of these adjective clauses (IT'S + PRESENT PARTICIPLE . . . PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE) creates the same refrain-like quality we saw in the previous example; although here, the topic of the discourse fuses with the structure of the language to attain a more powerful, menacing quality.

Of course, Krook is supposedly quoting Tom Jarndyce, a literate speaker; we have no way of verifying the likely possibility that Krook is paraphrasing him. But certainly the structure of Krook's retelling of Tom Jarndyce's description suggests that Krook "coded" it in a (for him) more familiar oral form. In any event, Tom Jarndyce's literacy does not prevent him from using oral strategies in his speech (as he does in our example): "literate tradition does not replace
oral. Rather, when literacy is introduced, the two are superimposed upon and intertwined with each other" (Tannen 3). In fact, the orality-based structure of Tom Jarndyce's speech is only one device which enables Krook to recall such an extended piece of conversation. The other is Tom's use of metaphors to ground his description of Chancery in concrete terms.

The "it" referred to by Tom Jarndyce is not merely the fact of the Court of Chancery: "it" refers metonymously to Chancery's effects, the dreadful, soul-draining misery that all the Court's victims experience. Experiences such as the ones Tom Jarndyce is describing, however, are subjective and individualized abstractions, and *Bleak House* is, in one sense, a collection of case studies in how different personalities react to the influence of Chancery (see, for example, Brogunier). An oral mind would have a difficult time remembering individual emotional reactions to phenomena unless those actions were related in everyday terms, "with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld" (Ong, *Orality* 42). Thus, what enables Krook to recall Tom Jarndyce's vivid description of Chancery are the simple, yet striking, evocations of common physical experience: grinding in a mill, being burned, being stung by bees, etc. These experiences are objective; they can be witnessed or personally experienced, and thus can be more easily comprehended by the oral mind.
Krook's obsession with the hoarding of old legal documents [what Tony Jobling refers to as a "monomania" with Krook (401)], and his acquisitiveness in general are also partly related to his orality. His "liking for rust and must and cobwebs" (50) and his refusal "to part with anything once I lay hold of . . . or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing" (50) are characteristic of an oral culture, which can't "abear" to lose any of its precious cultural wisdom. The need for repetition of wisdom in oral cultures "establishes a highly traditionalist or conservative set of mind that with good reason inhibits intellectual experimentation" (Ong, Orality 41). Krook's refusal to let anything go that he once possesses, then, does not merely exemplify his personal selfishness; it also demonstrates the oral tendency to hoard wisdom. One irony of this situation, of course, is that most of the documents Krook hoards are worthless. Another, and far more important irony is that the most important paper in Bleak House, the Jarndyce will, is held by an illiterate with no accurate perception of its worth.

Krook's obsession with possessing documents also stems from another feature of his orality: his view of words as magical. As Ong says, "oral peoples commonly, and probably universally, consider words to have great power" (32). Indeed, Krook's belief that words contain power explains why Krook fetishizes the printed word: his orality leads him to consider words as valuable commodities. This view manifests
itself in Krook's behavior when his fetishizing of language restrains him from exposing more than one letter at a time during his writing "lesson" for Esther:

"What is it?"

"J."

With another glance at me, and a glance at the door, he rubbed it out, and turned an a in its place (not a capital letter this time), and said, "What's that?"

I told him. He then rubbed that out, and turned the letter r, and asked me the same question. He went on quickly, until he had formed, in the same curious manner, beginning at the ends and bottoms of the letters, the word JARNDYCE, without once leaving two letters on the wall together.

"What does that spell?" he asked me.

When I told him, he laughed. In the same odd way, yet with the same rapidity, he then produced singly, and rubbed out singly, the letters forming the two words BLEAK HOUSE. These, in some astonishment, I also read; and he laughed again.

(55)

Krook's suspicious glances reflect his inexact sense for what he is writing, as well as his belief in the intrinsic value of written words. He cannot bring himself to write an entire word for Esther because she, as a literate, could understand it more readily, and so take it away from Krook. Thus, he
uses his method of writing to keep Esther as much in the dark as possible. Only when he has correctly produced an actual word does he feel delight because his performance shows Esther that he has some of the power—the magic—of the written word. Thus, when Tulkinghorn asks Krook whether he can read, shortly after they discover Hawdon’s corpse, Krook replies, "No, I can’t," and then exhibits "a sudden grin" (129).

Whereas with Esther Krook pretended to have a moderate degree of literacy, he grins smugly and denies his literacy here because he realizes that having the ability to read would put him in the service of Tulkinghorn, whom he recognizes (123) as a proficient master of language from the Court of Chancery. If Krook had said he could read, he would have to comply with the old lawyer’s request; Tulkinghorn’s greater control of the magical power of language would put Krook in his power.

Closely related to the oral mind’s view of words as magical things is its view of names as especially magical, and the belief that one has a form of control over another if one knows his name: "oral peoples commonly think of names (one kind of words) as conveying power over things" (Ong, Orality 33). We see this aspect of the oral mind in Krook in his special effort to learn Richard’s name:

"Why you appear to trouble yourself a good deal about the causes before your noble and learned brother, the other Chancellor!"

"Yes," said the old man abstractedly. "Sure! Your name now will be—" (51)
Krook takes a sinister joy in recalling Richard's name because he perceives on some level that knowing Richard's name will grant him a sort of power over one of the wards in Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce that is analogous to the power the Lord Chancellor has over his "victims." Further, it is relevant here to point out that Krook carefully withholds his own name from others; he only introduces himself once to anyone in the novel, and then he introduces himself as "the Chancellor" (180). To do otherwise would be to expose himself, to let his guard down, which the oral mind sees as a precarious act.

Krook's use of "noble and learned brother" to name the Lord Chancellor also stems from his residual orality. As Ong states, "oral cultures encourage triumphalism" (Orality 49) for mnemonic purposes. Because of the finiteness of human memory, the oral mind prefers storing information which fits into convenient categories and polarities in the form of epithets, such as "wise Nestor, furious Achilles, clever Odysseus" (Ong, Orality 70) or "good and evil, virtue and vice, villains and heroes" (Ong, Orality 45). Similarly, oral memory favors recollection of contests or competitions because the result of a contest is a winner and a loser—a simple polarity. Ong refers to this quality of oral thought as its "agonistic" (43) tone. One way this agonistic tone presents itself in speech is through vituperative "agonistic name-calling" (Ong, Orality 45), but at the other end of the polarity "is the fulsome expression of praise which is found everywhere in connection with orality" (Ong, Orality 45).
term "noble and learned brother" is an example of this "fulsome expression of praise" which Krook no doubt picked up at the Court of Chancery. The Court is, after all, a canonically oral agonistic arena in which lawyers battle to win cases, and their primary weapon in their battles is the spoken word. Thus, epithets such as "noble and learned brother" and "my esteemed colleague" are still used in courts today, or anywhere in which the spoken word is the vehicle for formal argument. Krook, as a highly residually oral mind, can naturally be expected to adopt the use of phraseology with such agonistic origins.

Other instances of Krook’s behavior can be related to his predisposition towards agonistic thinking. Ong states that "Not only in the use to which knowledge is put, but also in the celebration of physical behavior, oral cultures reveal themselves as agonistically programmed" (44). We see this trait in Krook’s fascination with and vivid retelling of the suicide of Tom Jarndyce, as well as in his rapt attention at the finding of Hawdon’s corpse. Krook’s demonstration of Lady Jane’s (his cat) formidable destructive abilities--"Hi! show’em how you scratch. Hi! Tear, my lady!" (51)--also denotes his preoccupation with violent physical behavior.

Finally, one further example from Krook’s speech demonstrates its agonistic tone. Ong states that a request for information is viewed by oral cultures "as agonistic, and, instead of being really answered, is frequently parried" (68-9). Thus, when Tulkinghorn enters the Rag and Bottle Shop
seeking Captain Hawdon, Krook evades the old lawyer's original question twice while sizing up Tulkinghorn:

"Pray is your lodger within?"
"Male or female, sir?" says Krook.
"Male. The person who does copying."

Mr. Krook has eyed his man narrowly. Knows him by sight. Has an indistinct impression of his aristocratic repute.

"Did you wish to see him, sir?" (123)

While it may be argued that Krook’s first response is merely a request for more information (he does, after all, have two lodgers), a more polite person could have given Tulkinghorn his answer right away. Krook’s second response clearly baits Tulkinghorn since he has obviously come to see Hawdon.

To this point, the psychodynamics of orality developed by Walter Ong has given us an objective framework for examining the extent of Krook’s orality. I have tried to show that Krook signifies his high degree of residual orality in his frequent use of oral conversational strategies, in his conservativeness, in his view of words as instruments of "power" and his consequent fetishizing of the written word, and in his inclination to agonistic modes of thought. Next, I would like to examine the limits of Krook’s literacy.

What exactly is the extent of Krook’s literacy? Tony Jobling, Krook’s "tutor," gives the best estimation:

"Read! He’ll never read. He can make all the letters separately, and he knows most of them
separately when he sees them; he has got on that much, under me; but he can't put them together. He's too old to acquire the knack of it now—and too drunk." (398)

Jobling's estimate of Krook's literacy is low, but not quite accurate. Krook does "put them together" when he spells Jarndyce and Bleak House for Esther. But Krook's spelling is based purely on his remarkable knack for rote memorization: "He never forgets anything" (397), as he himself admits: "I have a turn for copying from memory, you see, miss, though I can neither read nor write" (55-56). And indeed Krook himself does not rate his success highly:

"What are you doing here?" asked my Guardian.
"Trying to learn myself to read and write," said Krook.
"And how do you get on?"
"Slow. Bad," returned the old man, impatiently.
"It's hard at my time of life." (181)

Krook's unsuccessful attempts to learn to read, however, do not keep him from doggedly pursuing his "studies": "He is always spelling out words . . . and chalking them over the table and the shop-wall, and asking what this is, and what that is . . ." (401).

Still, Krook knows only letters. What few words he does know he has learned by rote; it was only by matching letters, in fact, that he was able to find Captain Hawdon's letters to Lady Dedlock. However, the fact that Krook's attempts to
learn to read and write are stymied at the level of the individual letter reflects ironically on Krook's personality. Individual letters alone do not mean anything. They must be combined to become meaningful signs. In a metaphorically similar way, individuals and their actions have no meaning unless they are shown in relation to other individuals. Language, like individuals, must exist in a context in order to have meaning. By shutting himself off from most human society, Krook fails to interact with other individuals and thus his life becomes as devoid of meaning as a page full of unrelated letters. Thus, the pursuit of greater linguistic skills, which should bring Krook closer to others, only isolates him because of his selfish aims. Consequently, Krook's method of writing--reversing the usual direction of forming a letter--can be seen as symbolically perverted because his motivations for learning to write are perverted; his "backward" writing is "an objectification of his lack of interest in his lodgers and neighbors and society in general" (Blount 199).

But even though the extent of Krook's "literacy" lies in his recognition of individual letters, that in itself is enough to affect his personality: "It takes only a moderate degree of literacy to make a tremendous difference in thought processes" (Ong, Orality 50). For instance, Krook's knowledge of the alphabet gives him a powerful mnemonic tool:

The alphabet as a simple sequence of letters is a major bridge between oral mnemonic and literate
mnemonics: generally the sequence of the letters of the alphabet is memorized orally and then used for largely visual retrieval of materials. (Ong, Orality 100-101)

We have all been exposed to mnemonic devices involving the memorization of the alphabet, most commonly in nursery rhymes, since most literate people learn their alphabets in childhood. Interestingly, John Jarndyce refers to such a mnemonic device in chapter 8 when he mentions the "history of the Apple Pie" (88), a Mother Goose rhyme designed to teach children the alphabet from A to Z. When Krook is introduced to Richard Carstone in chapter 5, he uses his knowledge of the alphabet to place him:

"Carstone," he repeated, slowly checking off that name upon his forefinger; and each of the others he went on to mention, upon a separate finger. "Yes. There was the name of Barbary, and the name of Clare, and the name of Dedlock, too, I think." (51)

Probably Krook has somewhere encountered an alphabetic list of the interested parties in the great suit; thus, when he needs to recall a name from the suit, he uses the alphabetical sequence of letters to recall that name. Here, his recall is plainly in alphabetical order: Barbary, then Clare, then Dedlock. He goes no further than "D" because he has placed Richard's name.
So, Krook's level of literacy stops at the recognition of individual letters. Although he can recognize some words through rote memorization, his ability to recognize words is not grounded in any accurate sense of how written language functions. Here, we have arrived at the key to understanding the prime motivating factor influencing Krook's behavior: Krook's inability to decipher the written word (which he has chosen to surround himself with in his cluttered shop) causes him to experience intense anxiety over his inability to interiorize literacy. I will show that Krook's anxiety, in turn, leads him to transfer his frustration to the Lord Chancellor of the Court of Chancery since he personifies for Krook an unimpeachable dominance of both the oral and the literate worlds.

Krook's anxiety over his failure to grasp literacy ["I don't know what I may have lost by not being learnd afore" (181)] is typical of oral peoples. Envy does seem to play a strong role in Krook's desire to read. Tony Jobling hypothesizes that Krook may have gained his incentive for learning to read "by hanging about the Lord Chancellor's Court and hearing of documents forever" (401). Ong tells us that there is scarcely an oral culture left that is not "aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy. This awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary orality" (Orality 15). To overcome this agony, Ong rather dramatically states that oral peoples must "die to keep on living" (15); in other words, they must release a
part of themselves, their oral self—to gain admittance into
the literate world. Yet Krook is plainly afraid to take this
risk, and too selfish and insecure to seek assistance in
learning to read, and when combined, these self-imposed
inhibitions are transmuted in him to a high degree of
personal anxiety.

Rollo May’s seminal work on the subject of anxiety, The
Meaning of Anxiety, provides a useful framework for
discussing Krook’s personality. May accepts the traditional
psychoanalytic definition of anxiety, that it is an intense
state of uneasiness or dread lacking a specific referent, as
opposed to fear, for example, which is directed at a specific
object. May attempts to unify the diverse theories of anxiety
by claiming that anxiety is "the experience of Being asserting
itself against Nonbeing. The latter is that which would reduce
or destroy Being, such as aggression, fatigue, boredom, and
ultimately death" (xxi). In Krook’s case the threat of
Nonbeing stems from his self-perception of being controlled by
literates, and of "losing out" in a material sense. The
latter self-perception explains why Krook will show only a few
carefully chosen documents to Tony Jobling—he is unsure of
the value of what he possesses, and he fears being cheated.

Ironically, though, Krook’s fetishizing of the word is
exactly what keeps him from becoming master of it. His
selfish thinking locks him into a mold, allowing him to
derive gratification from the material possession of printed
matter, but ultimately he pays the "price of the loss of the
possibilities of discovering new truth, the exclusion of new learning, and the stunting of capacities to adapt to new situations" (May 335). He takes pleasure in his documents and in his role as mirror-Lord Chancellor, but his comfort in his assumed role stunts his mental and personal growth. His anxiety leads to "a paralyzing, to a greater or lesser degree, of the productive activities of the individual on various fronts--his thinking and feeling capacities as well as his capacity to plan and act" (May 348). We see the paralysis of Krook's mental abilities in Jobling's assessment that Krook hasn't progressed in his studies for the last "quarter of a century" (401); we see the paralysis of Krook's "feeling capacities" in his isolation and in his refusal to accept help in his "studies," even when it is kindly offered:

"It would be easier to be taught by some one," said my Guardian.

"Aye, but they might teach me wrong!" returned the old man, with a wonderfully suspicious flash of his eye. "I don't know what I may have lost by not being learnt afore. I wouldn't like to lose anything by being learnt wrong now."

"Wrong?" said my Guardian, with his good-humoured smile. "Who do you suppose would teach you wrong?"

"I don't know, Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House!" replied the old man, turning up his spectacles on his forehead, and rubbing his hands. "I don't
suppose as anybody would—but I’d rather trust my own self than another!” (181-2)

Krook's agony over his illiteracy is portrayed effectively here through his self-absorbed snippiness, and his statement about being taught "wrong" shows again his incomplete grasping of the nature of literacy.

In May's view, however, such feelings of anxiety as Krook experiences need not necessarily lead to selfish isolation. In fact, May believes that anxiety can spur creative people to greater achievements. It is only the neurotically anxious person, such as Krook, who fails to adapt to anxiety-creating situations. Neurotics establish psychological defenses by framing, or reducing the scope of their existence, preventing them from experiencing anxiety-causing situations. As May states, "in neurotic anxiety the purpose of the defense mechanisms, symptoms, etc., is to keep the inner conflict from being activated" (May 337). The end result of such constricted thinking is that the person's freedom, originality, capacity for independent love, as well as his other possibilities for expansion and development as an autonomous personality are renounced in the same process. By accepting impoverishment of personality, one can buy temporary freedom from anxiety, to be sure. But the price for this "bargain" is the loss of those unique and most precious characteristics of the human self. (May 349)
In this selection, especially in his use of the term "autonomous personality," May seems to have precisely Krook in mind. For Krook's method of overcoming his anxiety has taken a particular form: he has shed those characteristics which individualized him, and transformed his anxiety into a personal identification with the Lord Chancellor.

One cannot deny that Krook's literary existence is framed by his fascination and identification with the Court of Chancery. This view, in fact, is the one through which the critics discussed earlier (see above 4-5) have approached Krook. But now we can see how Krook's personal existence--his identity as an individual, not as a one-dimensional literary motif or caricature--is related to his identification with the Lord Chancellor. Krook's reference to himself as "the Chancellor," his reference to his shop as "Chancery," his attendance at court "pretty well every day" (51), and his instantaneous coming to attention at the mention of the great suit--

"Jarndyce!" said the old man with a start.

"Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The great suit, Krook," returned his lodger.

"Hi!" exclaimed the old man, in a tone of thoughtful amazement, and with a wider stare than before. "Think of it!" (51)

--all attest to his complete immersion in the mire that is the Court of Chancery.
We saw earlier that Krook's orally-fostered agonistic tendencies partly caused his fascination with the court, but what truly must fascinate this wretched little man, obsessed as he is with the control of language, is the imposing Lord Chancellor, who sits "in the midst of the mud and at the heart of the fog" (9) that is Chancery. The Lord Chancellor daily shows his unquestioned control over skilled oral "language merchants" like Tangle, Tulkinghorn, and Conversation Kenge. Further, the Lord Chancellor also demonstrates his rule over written language. With a wave of his hand he can dismiss or admit troops of lawyers and their various documents: "bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense" (6), all of which are greatly prized by Krook, because he cannot grasp their true worthlessness. On what better, or more likely, personage for Krook to place his anxieties? By grounding his identity in that of the Lord Chancellor, Krook attempts to form a bridge over the chasm between orality and literacy over which he stands.

Psychologists, of course, refer to such neurotic identifications as "transference." In transference, a person shifts his feelings, thoughts, and attitudes from one person or situation to another. Ernest Becker's discussion of transference in *The Denial of Death* is especially illuminating in Krook's case. Like May, Becker is concerned with how human beings confront death, or to use May's terms, how man asserts his sense of Being against the forms of
Nonbeing. Becker’s view of behavior, based primarily on the thought of Otto Rank, is that

As one’s whole life is a style or scenario with which one tries to deny oblivion and to extend oneself beyond death in symbolic ways, one is often untouched by the fact of his death because he has been able to surround it by larger meanings. (104-105)

The most appropriate way to deal with the fact of one’s own death, according to Becker, is to find some meaning in life that will appear to transcend death and, therefore, make death count for less. Society smiles upon some of the ways of finding meaning in life, such as through religion or art, but there are also other, less constructive ways for individuals to cope with the finiteness of their existence, such as psychological transference. In general, psychoanalysts "have always understood transference as a regressive phenomenon, uncritical, wishful, a matter of automatic control of one’s world" (Becker 142). In fleeing our anxieties, "We take our helplessness, our guilt, our conflicts, and we fix them to a spot in the environment" (Becker 144). This "automatic control" is what Krook seeks when he transfers his anxiety to the Lord Chancellor, even to the point of framing the scope of his existence around his perceptions of the court. Consider Becker’s elaboration on the transference object: "The transference object is the locus of our conscience, of our whole cosmology of good and evil . . . . In its concrete
existence it transcends mere symbolic commands, and what is more natural than conforming to this miraculousness?" (212). Krook conforms to the "miraculousness" of the Lord Chancellor to too great an extent, causing him to lose his individual self. It is ironic indeed that Krook should make such an all-consuming sacrifice, since by a much simpler sacrifice, that is, by merely accepting the help that is offered him by John Jarndyce, he could have the control of written language that he so craves. But by assuming the title "Lord Chancellor," and naming his shop the Court of Chancery, Krook becomes a textbook example of someone "who distorts the world to relieve his helplessness and fears, who sees things as he wishes them to be for his own safety, who acts automatically and uncritically" (Becker 129), all in a futile effort to escape being "taught wrong." So, perhaps, Krook did not spontaneously combust for any of the well-documented scientific reasons which Dickens cites; perhaps he was consumed by the Promethean fire of writing.
CHAPTER III

ORALITY, LITERACY AND THE PHILANTHROPIC SHAM

In Krook, we observed a character whose extensive residual orality, when combined with his personal shortcomings of greed and selfishness, caused him to forfeit his identity in a vain attempt to obtain control over written language. While Krook’s assumption of the persona of the Lord Chancellor allows him to assuage the anxiety he feels over not being able to manipulate writing, ultimately this choice subtracts his humanity from him and leaves him as merely a grotesque reflection of the Lord Chancellor. In this chapter I will show how three characters—Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Pardiggle, and Mr. Chadband—consciously or unconsciously abuse written and spoken communicative strategies. In doing so, I hope to supplement A. Abbott Ikeler’s analysis (which I shall discuss briefly) of Dickens’s method of characterization in Bleak House and further advance my argument about the role orality and literacy plays in appreciating the novel.

That Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle have subjugated their familial relationships to their philanthropic endeavors is obvious; in fact, this subjugation is in Bleak House the source both of effective humor and biting
criticism. But what I think must also be taken into account in a strong reading of these characters is the idea that both women improperly ground their "good works" in written technology, rather than in authentic, compassionate face-to-face interaction, and furthermore, that the resulting dehumanization of these ladies' respective familial relationships stems from their unconscious faith in the power of the written word to accomplish actual deeds and that it is the nature of the written word to encourage the development of such misguided notions. In the case of Mr. Chadband, I will demonstrate that his manipulation of oral rhetoric emblemizes his consciously evil acts in the novel, and that this element of conscious maliciousness also connects him to Dickens's satire of philanthropic humbugs.

To help prove these various points, I am going to enlist the arguments of A. Abbott Ikeler in his essay "The Philanthropic Sham: Dickens's Corrective Method in Bleak House." The "corrective method" of Mr. Ikeler's title is his answer to those critics (such as Orwell, Leavis, Garis and Frye) who accuse Dickens's novels of being overpopulated with superfluous characters, "squads of satellite figures" which result in "tangled subplots" and consequently "clutter or simply complicate argument and form" (Ikeler 497). Ikeler replies to these charges by arguing that Dickens's method of characterization can be understood by looking to his "inherited notions of character and to his method of composition" (498). In this statement, Ikeler refers
specifically to Dickens's "linear notion of character still rooted in Fielding, Smollett, and the Comedy of Humors tradition" (512) and to Dickens's practice of serializing his novels; Ikeler seeks to prove his thesis by examining one instance of what some consider to be an example of such "overpopulation": the existence of no fewer than eight characters in Dickens's satire of public charity. Confining his argument primarily to Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Pardiggle, and Mr. Chadband, Ikeler contends that rather than offer "one complex personality to grasp" (512), Dickens sought to express a more complicated truth about these philanthropic pretenders by emending each characterization with another characterization which broadened and deepened his message. Thus, Mrs. Jellyby's method of working primarily with foreign concerns through correspondence, and her abstractedness are "corrected" by Mrs. Pardiggle's work with local poor through direct confrontation, and the latter's almost brutal efficiency. By using this balancing method of character development, Ikeler argues, Dickens draws an effective portrait of philanthropic frauds; unfortunately, since both portraits are of women, we might be left with "the notion that fraudulent charity is somehow dependent upon the accident of sex" (507). To correct this notion, as well as the idea that charitable frauds are unconsciously misdirected, ineffective, annoying, but basically harmless (as Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle both suggest), Ikeler submits that Dickens created Mr. Chadband, who is not only male, but
is also the only member of the "officious crusaders" who is also a calculatedly "thorough-going counterfeit" (Ikeler 509). In sum,

Chadband corrects the last of the misapprehensions which earlier stereotypes were likely to encourage. Thereafter, in judging the philanthropic aggregate, we are led inexorably to identify their primary shared fault as destructive vanity in the mask of public commitment. (Ikeler 511)

Ikeler's arguments are persuasive and well-developed; however, I think he ignores some important facets of the characters he analyzes. First, he fails to mention that both Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle propagate their philanthropic concerns through writing, whereas Chadband operates primarily through his inflamed oratory and skewed rhetorical premises. Second, Ikeler neglects the fact that the natures of these two communicative media are related to the misguided delusions of Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle and the domestic consequences of their actions, and to the conscious evil of Mr. Chadband.

That Mrs. Jellyby's philanthropic endeavors are grounded in an absurd amount of correspondence is clear from the first time we are introduced to her "telescopic philanthropy." In chapter 4, Mr. Quale states that at one time Mrs. Jellyby has "received as many as from one hundred and fifty to two hundred letters respecting Africa in a single day" (41) and that at one time she "sent off five thousand circulars from one post-office at one time" (41). Later in the novel, Caddy
tells us that Mrs. Jellyby is preparing to send out five thousand new circulars (165). So far as the reader can determine, Mrs. Jellyby’s sphere of action begins and ends with her letter-writing; she remains cloistered in her house, as oblivious to the chaotic state of her children as she is to the realities of her Borrioboolan project.

Correspondence campaigns such as the one Mrs. Jellyby engages in are not inherently pernicious; such campaigns are used effectively to this day. The problem with Mrs. Jellyby’s campaigns is that in her hands, writing has not served as an instrument for expressing a truly compassionate concern for others’ well-being; rather, Mrs. Jellyby has allowed writing to foster in her an illusory vision of beneficent action which assumes in her mind the guise of real action. In creating this illusory world, Mrs. Jellyby falls prey to one of the inherent characteristics of writing, one which Plato has Socrates warn us of in the *Phaedrus*: the tendency of writing "to establish outside the mind what in reality can be only in the mind" (Ong, *Orality* 79). This theme of an individual’s establishing his own reality based on ideals he has picked up from written works is an old one in literature, and it reminds us immediately of *Don Quixote*. He creates his own world, bounded by abstract notions of romantic chivalry that he has picked up from medieval books on the subject. Quixote has, to borrow Ernest Becker’s terminology (introduced in chapter 2), created a "vital lie" (chivalry) around which he erects his "immortality project"
(e.g., the proverbial "tilting at windmills") to give his life meaning. Centuries after Don Quixote's time, Tom Sawyer will create a similar immortality project, based also upon his reading of chivalric tales (Barrow 87 ff). In like fashion, Mrs. Jellyby allows her obsession for charitable concerns to become her vital lie, and her correspondence becomes her immortality project. In fact, in Dickens's description of the Jellyby household he hints that written artifacts are not only the figurative, but also the literal source of Mrs. Jellyby's sustenance: "Richard, who sat by her, saw four envelopes in the gravy" (41) and "But such wonderful things came tumbling out of the closets when they were opened . . . books with butter sticking to the binding" (373). Unfortunately, however, her correspondence comes to have more importance to Mrs. Jellyby than her family or even the cause she is writing for. Conversation Kenge tells us that in the past, Mrs. Jellyby "has devoted herself to an extensive variety of public subjects" (35), and at the end of the novel, we learn that she has abandoned her African project for women's rights; the clear inference seems to be that while the cause may change, the writing remains, and it is the effects of the writing on which I shall focus. Here, as with Krook, I am once again looking past the surface representational nature of a character to what I think is a more interesting dimension; that is, in Mrs. Jellyby I am not looking at the topical satire involved in her foreign philanthropy scheme, but at her more interesting immersion in
When Dickens ironically describes Mrs. Jellyby’s aspect as one of "saintly abstraction," he suggests that her way of seeing things is not based on experience, but on the contingencies of her vital lie; that is, her hyperopia looks only to that imaginary sphere in which her philanthropic correspondence has meaning. The creation of this realm in Mrs. Jellyby’s mind has, no doubt, been encouraged by the tendency of writing to assume an importance in and of itself:

By isolating thought on a written surface, detached from any interlocutor, making utterance in this sense autonomous and indifferent to attack, writing presents utterance and thought as uninvolved with all else, somehow self-contained, complete. (Ong, *Orality* 132)

It is in this uninvolved, self-contained sphere that Mrs. Jellyby forms some very inaccurate views of the real world around her. For instance, she lacks any form of an accurate view of her Borrioboolan project. She envisions a placid and receptive native population—probably comparable to Rousseau’s "noble savage"—working "conjointly" (BH 165) with settlers to cultivate coffee and Christian morality. She also sees Africa’s sweltering climate ["The finest climate in the world!" (38)], as akin to Holborn’s and presenting no problem to the potential settlers of this land. Yet, at the
end of *Bleak House* we find that Mrs. Jellyby's African project fails "in consequence of the King of Borrioboola wanting to sell everybody--who survived the climate--for Rum" (768). Mrs. Jellyby also incorrectly believes that others value her work as much as she does. When she first meets Esther, she admonishes her for not performing her "proper" duties: "Do you know, Miss Summerson, I almost wonder that you never turned your thoughts to Africa" (38). Later in the novel Mrs. Jellyby will excuse herself to John Jarndyce from a visit to Bleak House because she is "correcting proofs of the plan" (165), but she asks Caddy to report that "she knows you'll [John Jarndyce] be interested to hear that" (165); Caddy's words, understandably, cause John Jarndyce to experience a very trying East Wind.

These two instances of Mrs. Jellyby's abstract thought, her inaccurate view of Africa and of how others see her work, are important to Dickens's satire, and they provide much humor. But other instances of Mrs. Jellyby's abstract thinking are not so humorous, specifically the effects of her behavior on her family. For instance, Mrs. Jellyby has clearly reduced her daughter Caddy to the subservient function of amanuensis, even referring to her as such: "my eldest daughter, who is my amanuensis" (38). Caddy, of course, is well aware of her place--"I know how I am used" (166)--"I am only pen and ink to her [Mrs. Jellyby]" (169). And Caddy's response to her treatment is not positive: she wishes "Africa was dead" (43) and accusingly asks, "Where's
Ma's duty as a parent?" (46-47). Dickens's description of the Jellyby children also encourages us to connect them to Mrs. Jellyby's immersion in writing; he uses metaphors of written or printed matter to describe the young Jellybys' woes: "The children tumbled about, and notched memoranda of their accidents in their legs, which were perfect little calendars of distress" (57) and "his [Peepy's] legs, so crossed and recrossed with scratches that they looked like maps" (165). Mr. Jellyby is also subsumed by Mrs. Jellyby's work. Richard correctly intuits Mr. Jellyby's nature when he defines him as a "nonentity" (35), which description Conversation Kenge aptly amends, stating that Mr. Jellyby is "merged--Merged--in the more shining qualities of his wife" (35). Esther claims that Mr. Jellyby "seemed to have been completely exhausted long before I knew him" (374).

We should also see that the way in which Mrs. Jellyby neglects her family, Caddy and Mr. Jellyby in particular, influences the paths they choose in the novel. Caddy, who for so long has been "only pen and ink" to her mother, marries Prince Turveydrop, wholavishes her with a pure affection from which she has been previously estranged. And, not by accident, Prince has great trouble with the physical act of writing. It is also ironic that when Mrs. Jellyby says farewell to Caddy after her wedding, she does not ask her daughter to write to her. Mr. Jellyby, who for most of his married life has been forced by his wife's neglect to seek "consolation in walls" (377), virtually
loses all ability to speak as the novel progresses, yet at the end of *Bleak House*, finds great pleasure in the company of the voluble windbag "Deportment" Turveydrop. Of the fates of the younger Jellybys we are told little, except for Peepy, who also finds pleasure in the company of the senior Turveydrop, but Dickens is quite clear about Caddy's and Mr. Jellyby's feelings; they both would prefer death to their present situation:

"I wish I was dead!" she [Caddy] broke out. "I wish we were all dead. It would be a great deal better for us" (44);

"My poor girl, you have not been very well taught how to make a home for your husband; but unless you mean with all your heart to strive to do it, you had better murder him than marry him--if you really love him." (369)

We come away from the Jellyby portrait then, with several clear conceptions regarding her and her philanthropic labors; as Ikeler states, "we are encouraged to believe public philanthropy is best represented by a derelict housewife backing remote causes" (502). In addition, we are also, evidently, encouraged to evaluate Mrs. Jellyby "from the outset . . . as wife and mother, not as a champion of emigration" (501) since Dickens never mentions any consequences of Mrs. Jellyby's philanthropy until the last few pages of the novel; to that point, the focus has clearly been on the chaotic state of the Jellyby household,
especially Caddy's struggles to escape it. But concerning the charge of being a negligent mother, Mrs. Jellyby is certainly guilty, although her guilt is more the result of her immersion in writing than the product of conscious maliciousness. Mrs. Jellyby is not evil, no matter how pernicious her negligence may seem; rather, her neglect of her family stems from her deluded view that she is accomplishing a greater good through her philanthropy. Her rationale here seems rather simple: since the rewards of marriage and motherhood are so time-consuming and very frequently offer no tangible rewards, why not adopt a past-time which is very time-consuming [in almost any emotional situation, Mrs. Jellyby excuses herself by saying she is too busy with her work, e.g., "Happily for me, I am so much engaged that I have no time to think about it" (295)] and which offers tangible rewards for work by an elementary equation: write more letters, receive more letters—a more palpable proof of self-worth. In sum, we leave the Jellyby portrait with not only the conception of public philanthropy which Ikeler describes, i.e. an addled, neglectful housewife concerned with foreign affairs who seldom leaves her house, but also with the sense that Mrs. Jellyby is a very self-absorbed, but harmlessly deluded dilettante, whose absorption in her correspondence explains not only her negligence as wife and mother, but also her lack of awareness concerning the objects of her "telescopic philanthropy."
Ikeler asserts that to fan out from the somewhat limited view of philanthropy which we see in Mrs. Jellyby, Dickens tried to extend his indictment of philanthropic shams by presenting Mrs. Pardiggle. And from our first view of her, it seems clear that we are seeing quite a different specimen of charitable fraud. After the abstractedness of Mrs. Jellyby, we are almost as bowled over by Mrs. Pardiggle's mechanical efficiency as the chairs she unknowingly overturns with her skirts. In contrast to the often unsupervised, often missing Jellyby children, the five Pardiggle boys are herded about by their mother in regimental fashion.

Still, when Mrs. Pardiggle mentions her work with the Tockahoopoo Indians and further, mentions that her boys have contributed to Mrs. Jellyby's African project, we begin to think that Mrs. Pardiggle is merely a more efficient version of Mrs. Jellyby, a very slight variation on a by now familiar theme. But despite some overlapping interests, a major difference exists between the charitable endeavors of the two women: while Mrs. Jellyby remains sequestered in her home, enmired solely in correspondence concerning foreign affairs, Mrs. Pardiggle doggedly visits the presumed objects of her philanthropy in their own environment--"her metier is direct confrontation with the poor" (Ikeler 505). On the face of it, then, Mrs. Pardiggle's works appear to be a vast improvement over the works of Mrs. Jellyby since the former comes face to face with those whom she professes to help, not allowing her energies to be diverted into mere correspondence. But of
course, in the episode involving the brick-makers of St. Albans (chapter 8), we quickly see that Mrs. Pardiggle's efforts are merely empty posturing travesties of true charity. Her lack of compassion renders her as powerless to help the poor as she is to save the unfortunate infant who dies in Esther's and Ada's presence.

Mrs. Pardiggle's ineffectualness in helping the poor stems from the fact that she is "terribly deficient in humanity" (Ikeler 506), that there exists between her and her victim-beneficiaries an "iron barrier," a judgment which Esther, who is quite reliable in her estimates of character, astutely makes. I contend that the ore from which that iron barrier is cast is Mrs. Pardiggle's literate mindset manifested specifically by her blind faith in the power of the written word to perform effectual, tangible acts.

We may not see immediately that Mrs. Pardiggle's actions are grounded in fetishizing literacy, for Dickens expresses this fact more subtly than in the Jellyby sketch. After all, Mrs. Pardiggle does not surround herself with mounds of writing-paper and envelopes. Yet, one of the first things we are told about her is that she is "almost as powerful a correspondent as Mrs. Jellyby herself" (93), implying that Mrs. Pardiggle, like Mrs. Jellyby, believes that letter-writing itself can accomplish good. But the most telling instance of Mrs. Pardiggle's improductive attitude towards writing is the way in which she completely ignores the needs of those she supposedly seeks to help by
dispensing moralistic pamphlets to them, despite the fact that they cannot read (99). She further compounds the damage by taking out a good book and reading at the poor brick-makers, in this instance using her literacy aggressively, "as if it were a constable's staff" (99) to try to take her audience into "religious custody . . . as if she were an inexorable moral Policeman carrying them all off to a station-house" (99). It is at this point that Mrs. Pardiggle shows another of her literate biases in her failure to recognize the needs of her audience. Both speakers and writers must shape their discourse in ways that their audiences can understand. But a speaker can obviously respond more readily to his audience since it is more immediate; for the writer, on the other hand, "the audience is always a fiction" (Ong, Orality 102). Writers can never know precisely who will read their work and so they must create an audience and direct their discourse at that audience. This necessity reminds us again of Socrates's objection to writing, that it pretends to establish outside the mind what can only be inside the mind. In this case, Mrs. Pardiggle has created a sphere, much like Mrs. Jellyby has, in which her acts have effectual validity. She has devised a method for approaching the poor which she believes to be productive, but which in actuality merely reconciles the mechanical immutability of her vain beliefs with her delusion of helping the poor. The mechanical aspect of her approach is sardonically depicted by Dickens in the brick-maker's bitter
recitation of what must be a well-worn script for Mrs. Pardiggle:

Is my daughter a-washin? Yes, she is a-washin . . . .
An't my place dirty? Yes, it is dirty . . . .
Have I read the little book wot you left? No, I an't read the little book wot you left . . . .
How have I been conducting of myself? Why, I've been drunk for three days; and I'd a been drunk four, if I'd a had the money. Don't I never mean for to go to church? No, I don't never mean for to go to church . . . . And how did my wife get that black eye? Why, I giv' it her; and if she says I didn't, she's a Lie! (99)

The essence of this scene—starving illiterate folk confronted with literate facades intended ostensibly to help them—will later be neatly and more sentimentally paralleled in the image of poor Jo on the doorstep of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (198).

The brickmaker's attitude toward literate technology invites comparison with Krook's. Oral peoples can have no exact knowledge of the power of the written word and so, as in the case of Krook, they are often led to fetishize it. But this fetishism would only seem to occur in cases where the written word is seen to have power. We saw in the previous chapter the many ways in which Krook mistakenly interpreted the powers of the artifacts of literate technology and how this belief affected his behavior. But the brickmaker is
another case entirely. He has probably not seen the written word accomplish great deeds or have any sway over human actions. And in the case of Mrs. Pardiggle’s literacy, he has seen useless pieces of paper cast at him and heard words read to him from a book by an insincere shrew of a woman. We can thus expect him to disdain the help Mrs. Pardiggle offers him in the form of written artifacts. What the poor need, clearly, is material aid and true human compassion, neither of which is offered by Mrs. Pardiggle.

The Pardiggle portrait, unlike the Jellyby portrait, allows us to evaluate its subject by viewing Mrs. Pardiggle in direct confrontation with her victim-beneficiaries. But like the Jellyby portrait, it also allows us to see the domestic consequences of neglect which result from obsession with charitable works, and, as might be expected, the Pardiggles share much in common with the Jellyby’s. For instance, although we are told much less of Mr. Pardiggle than of Mr. Jellyby, his identity is likewise subsumed, or "merged" into that of his wife. Like his children, he makes donations under Mrs. Pardiggle’s direction (95). While Mr. Pardiggle does not seem to be "psychically murdered" (Ikeler 506) as Mr. Jellyby is, Esther does hint that the two men have much in common when she daydreams about the two neglected husbands sharing a conversation about their lots in life (95). In sum, although we are told little about Mr. Pardiggle, he too seems to suffer wifely neglect as a result
of the fact that his wife operates in a self-created sphere which excludes normal marital relations.

The Pardiggle children are similarly excluded from their mother's attention. As in her philanthropy, Mrs. Pardiggle is only superficially performing her maternal duties; although it is true that her children are not, as noted, running about unsupervised. However, Mrs. Pardiggle herself shows her literate obsession when she introduces her children to Esther. Even before she mentions the names of her children, Mrs. Pardiggle points out to Esther that she "may have seen their names in a printed subscription list" (93), as if the presence of their names on such a list were their most important aspect; she does the same thing when mentioning her husband (95). Interestingly, Ong points out that

A chirographic (writing) culture and even more a typographic (print) culture can distance and in a way denature even the human, itemizing such things as the names of leaders and political divisions in an abstract, neutral list entirely devoid of a human action context. (Orality 42)

The irony of Mrs. Pardiggle's pride in the "contributions" of her sons is clear, and even more obvious when seen in the context of her literate bias. Such lists as Mrs. Pardiggle refers to do nothing to help anyone; they merely feed Mrs. Pardiggle's delusion that her sons are not only in accord with her efforts but also involved in their operation.
The young Pardiggle children greatly resent the lack of maternal attention they receive: they squirm and reluctantly follow their mother on her charitable rounds, and when Esther meets them, they instantly vent their frustrations concerning their mother's facade of concern for their personal well-being by pinching Esther and extorting money from her. Clearly the Pardiggle children, young as they are, sense the false pretense of their allowance: "What does she make a sham for, and pretend to give me money, and take it away again?" (97). They sense that their mother's charitable concerns, emblematized by Mrs. Pardiggle's correspondence and dispensing of moralistic pamphlets, have caused her to mechanize her relationship to her children, subjugating what should be her devotion to her family to her misconceived notions of what constitutes good works, i.e. mechanically force-feeding a pre-fabricated morality, which is sustained only by written artifacts. She performs "charity by wholesale" (100), making the instrument of her good works the written word rather than compassionate humane action.

But in the interests of Dickens's indictment of charitable frauds, Mrs. Pardiggle does little to correct the impressions the reader has received from the Jellyby portrait. Both characters are, after all, women and, "both are harridans" (Ikeler 506). They both absorb their husbands' personalities and they ignore the emotional needs of their children. And, finally, both women use as the medium of their operations the artifacts of literate
technology, either with correspondence, moralistic pamphlets, or other good books, which allows them to engender a fictional sphere in which their actions appear to have real value. This large number of similarities keeps Dickens’s charges against philanthropic shams from obtaining much force. If his accusations are to have much force, another character must be created to correct the limited view we have been shown by the portraits of the two women; in other words:

The type [of the charitable fraud] must, in effect, proliferate until each extraneous characteristic, each misleading accident of personality, has been matched and thus eliminated by its opposite . . . . Just as the romantic negligence of Mrs. Jellyby demands the puritanical discipline of Mrs. Pardiggle, so the shrill feminism of both . . . demands the delineation of a man as large, smug, and loathsome as they.

The answer, of course, is Mr. Chadband. (Ikeler 508)

Indeed, Chadband corrects immediately many of the notions created by the Jellyby/Pardiggle sketch. He is obviously a man, and he does not bother himself with foreign concerns. Further, he is married, but his shrewish wife, the former Miss Barbary, seems anything but merged in his personality. Finally, Mr. Chadband has no children, so we cannot judge him on that front. But the most important difference between Chadband and the two ladies is that he is perfectly aware of
his ineffectualness. In fact, while all three of these charitable humbugs fail to accomplish any philanthropic good, Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle sincerely believe that they are effective; only Mr. Chadband "is a thorough-going counterfeit" (Ikeler 509). While we may at first think of him merely as a harmless con man because of his manipulation of Mrs. Snagsby, his true nature is revealed in chapter 54, when he tries to blackmail Sir Leicester Dedlock with his knowledge of Lady Dedlock's past. Ikeler concludes that in demonstrating his conscious maliciousness, Mr. Chadband corrects the last of the misapprehensions which earlier stereotypes were likely to encourage. Thereafter, in judging the philanthropic aggregate, we are led inexorably to identify their primary shared fault as destructive vanity in the mask of public commitment. (511)

With this statement, Ikeler concludes his cogent argument about Dickens's "corrective" method of characterization in *Bleak House*. Yet, Ikeler has omitted mention of the role of the use of spoken and written language in the overall scheme of Dickens's critique of public philanthropy. As we have seen, Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle's use of written technology emblemizes their abstraction from positive action. Yet, if we are to have a complete view of the many guises of philanthropic shams, we must also see a character who uses oral discourse in a way that fails to accomplish actual good. And while Dickens does make a passing reference to Mr.
Chadband's writing (234), we see his "philanthropy" enacted entirely through oral means. What is more, in the case of Mr. Chadband the mode of communication he uses to propagate his philanthropy symbolizes his conscious evil because the way he speaks demonstrates his conscious manipulation of oral discourse to further his selfish ends. For although he professes to be "a harvest labourer" and "a toiler and a moiler" (318) in the spiritual interest of his audience, his pattern of discourse belies his stated intent. More specifically, his conversations reveal more than a passing familiarity with rhetorical methods of persuasion, as well as deliberate misuse of those methods.

The first suggestion that Mr. Chadband is aware of the uses of rhetoric is Dickens's mention of Mr. Chadband's being "as he expresses it, 'in the ministry'" (234). Whether or not we believe Mr. Chadband about his official status as a man of God, Dickens does concede that he has various "pulpit habits" (320), by which he refers to his manner of addressing his "flock." Historically, men of the cloth received training in classical rhetoric, and that training was reflected in their sermons. Some of the greatest sermons ever produced--those of John Donne, for instance, or Jonathan Edwards--make extensive use of rhetorical figures such as epithet, balance, antithesis, and other formulary structures, all of which we have previously seen to be strategies associated with oral communication. Ong, in fact, stresses the close relationship of orality and rhetoric:
Rhetoric was at root the art of public speaking, of oral address, for persuasion (forensic and deliberative rhetoric) or exposition (epideictic rhetoric). The Greek rhetor is from the same root as the Latin orator and means a public speaker. In the perspectives worked out by Havelock (1963) it would appear obvious that in a very deep sense the rhetorical tradition represented the old oral world and the philosophical tradition the new chirographic structures of thought. (Orality 109)

In today's popular view, "mere rhetoric" has negative connotations, but rhetoric is simply a tool of persuasion, which, like any tool, can be abused. The ancient Greek rhetorician Gorgias is the first man credited with developing this latent potentiality of rhetoric by stressing the mere verbal dexterity of his students in using rhetorical devices and by requiring them to argue both sides of an issue, regardless of the rightness or wrongness of their position, or even the existence of a dispute at all. We see this sort of sophistry very clearly in Mr. Chadband's establishment of Mr. Snagsby as an ostensible antagonist in chapter 25. The rhetorical stance, of course, requires one to do this; as Ong points out, "Rhetoric of course is essentially antithetical . . . for the orator speaks in the face of at least implied adversaries. Oratory has deep agonistic roots" (Orality 111). Quite simply, one cannot argue if there is no one to argue against. Thus, if Mr. Chadband is to argue himself as a
champion of charity and good, someone must assume the role of evildoer. The unfortunate Mr. Snagsby is Mr. Chadband's choice. Dickens tells us that

The present effect of this flight of oratory [by Mr. Chadband]—much admired for its general power by Mr. Chadband's followers—being not only to make Mr. Chadband unpleasantly warm, but to represent the innocent Mr. Snagsby in the light of a determined enemy to virtue, with a forehead of brass and a heart of adamant . . . (321)

Mr. Snagsby is, of course, harmlessly innocent of the charges that Chadband makes against him, but by cleverly playing off of Mrs. Snagsby's unfounded assumptions about Mr. Snagsby's philandering, Chadband only endears himself more to his current patron by convincing her of her husband's apparent deceptions.

We see another case of Mr. Chadband's misuse of rhetorical devices in his abuse of the "places." Ong tells us that in classical rhetoric, the *loci communes* ("commonplaces," or simply the "places") referred to those methods that a speaker relied on as tested and proven ways of constructing a proof; these methods include "defining, looking to causes, effects, opposites, and all the rest" (*Orality* 110-11). The places also referred to a body of cultural knowledge—sayings, proverbs, often cliches—of which a speaker could rely on his audience approving. Mr. Chadband exploits this rhetorical device by constantly referring to vague abstractions which
nonetheless carry positive cultural connotations. Thus, he will liken "Peace" to the proverbial dove (318), and associate "Terewth" (truth) with light (321), all the while abusing the rhetorical question to prove his point and establish himself as a reliable speaker. A most entertaining example of his skewed reasoning is in Mr. Chadband's unsolicited explanation for why he wishes peace on the Snagsby household:


Here, the use of the painfully absurd rhetorical questions and of the "therefore" imbues Mr. Chadband's mere train of pleasant-sounding synonyms with the form of logical reasoning, when he actually says nothing. To the reader, such rot is immediately transparent, but Dickens is clear about the effects of Mr. Chadband's oratory, which he says "is widely received and much admired" (237) by his constituency.

Finally, Mr. Chadband also abuses the appeal to emotion, which is cited by Aristotle as a form of artificial proof (Dixon 24-25). Aristotle claimed that by manipulating the emotions of his audience, the skillful speaker could unfairly sway his audience and thus make them more receptive to his discussion. Clearly, sheer volubility is one technique of Mr. Chadband's for controlling an audience; his booming voice, his emotion, and his overall forceful nature intimidate his
audience and so make them more malleable. But Mr. Chadband also has other, more subtle ways of controlling the emotions of his followers. In chapter 25, Dickens tells us that Mr. Chadband has a pulpit habit of fixing some member of his congregation with his eye, and fatly arguing his points with that particular person; who is understood to be expected to be moved to an occasional grunt, groan, gasp or other audible expression of inward working; which expression of inward working being echoed by some elderly lady in the next pew, and so communicated, like a game of forfeits, through a circle of the more fermentable sinners present, serves the purpose of parliamentary cheering, and gets Mr. Chadband’s steam up. (320)

Here the unfortunate member of the congregation is Mr. Snagsby, who, as noted, is about to be established as a pseudo-antagonist. But the important point of this scene is how Mr. Chadband controls his audience by initiating an emotional response in one member and allowing it to spread domino-like throughout his audience, eliciting a small mob psychology. The resulting emotional nature of the audience leaves them putty in Mr. Chadband’s oily, bear-like hands.

In Mr. Chadband, then, we have the far end of Dickens’s spectrum of philanthropic shams, bounded on one end by the purely literary efforts of Mrs. Jellyby, mediated by the blend of written and oral strategies of Mrs. Pardiggle, and
bounded on the other end by the oral machinations of Mr. Chadband. The literate grounding of the two women symbolizes their illusory belief in the effectualness of their works; Mr. Chadband’s manipulation of rhetorical devices (which retain a high degree of orality) symbolizes his conscious malevolence. Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle are controlled by their medium; Mr. Chadband controls his. Thus, the transition pointed out by Ikeler from unconscious, merely misguided evil to conscious evil is made complete by examining the role of written and spoken discourse. Furthermore, his suggestion of an agglutinative design in Dickens’s characterization is enhanced by adding another basis of comparison, namely, the characters’ abuse of communication strategies.
A full appreciation of Bleak House is impossible without knowing how the subtext of orality and literacy functions within the novel. In a work as vast and complex as Bleak House, this vital subtext provides the reader with a means of integrating a wide variety of individual personality traits by showing that they derive from characteristics of the literate and residually oral mind-sets. I have shown, for example, how knowledge of residual orality explains one way in which Krook becomes individualized from his representative function in Bleak House. I have also shown how an awareness of literacy’s tendency to encourage abstract thought explains the distractedness of Mrs. Jellyby and the harsh insensitivity of Mrs. Pardiggle. Finally, I have shown how Mr. Chadband’s manipulation of classical rhetorical techniques (which are, essentially, oral communication techniques) emblemizes his conscious malevolence. Having examined in detail how orality/literacy studies can help one better understand these four characters, I will now look briefly at some other instances of characterization in Bleak House in which speaking or writing plays an important role in order to show the pervasiveness of Dickens’s use of speaking and writing in
determining character and theme. Finally, I will discuss how Dickens's presentation of his characters' use of spoken or written language is connected to broader themes of the novel.

From the first few chapters of *Bleak House*, it should be clear that this novel is very much concerned with issues of orality and literacy. In the very first chapter, the reader is presented with the Court of Chancery's population of descriptively named "language merchants," such as Tangle, Blowers, and Conversation Kenge, as well as with the striking image of bewildering mountains of legal paperwork. In the Chancery satire, the waste and lethargy of the legal process is equated with the empty oral posturing of the lawyers and with the meaningless amalgamation of legal documents. Then, in the second chapter of *Bleak House*, it is Lady Dedlock's uncharacteristically animated recognition of Nemo's handwriting ["Who copied that?" (16)] and Tulkinghorn's ensuing interest in Lady Dedlock's curiosity that initiates the plot thread of Lady Dedlock's mysterious past; this element of the plot--the mystery of Lady Dedlock--assumes greater importance as the novel progresses and eventually displaces the Chancery satire as the main interest of the novel. Both of these sub-plots are initiated through descriptions of the orientation of individual characters toward speech and writing.

More strikingly, as I have shown, Dickens also bases entire characterizations on the individual's orientation toward speech and writing or further develops a character in
this respect. For instance, Grandfather Smallweed's view that reading and writing are useless because "It don't pay" (266) tells us a great deal about his overall personality and effectively foreshadows his collaborative attempt (with Chadband) to blackmail Sir Leicester Dedlock with letters from Lady Dedlock's past. For Smallweed, the blackmail attempt becomes an effort to make reading and writing "pay" by using documents against someone. This action contrasts Smallweed with Trooper George Rouncewell, who steadfastly withholds samples of Nemo's (Captain Hawdon's) handwriting from Tulkinghorn until his hand is forced by Tulkinghorn's threats to foreclose on the Bagnets' property. In turn, George Rouncewell's request to his brother the Iron-master to be withdrawn from his mother's will sets him in contrast with the unfortunate Richard Carstone, who has framed his existence with his expectations of wealth contingent on the settlement of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. In each of these cases, Dickens effectively uses parallel instances of the relationships of characters to written documents to give those characterizations added depth.

A large part of Sir Leicester Dedlock's description is also related to his concern with his loss of ability to communicate. Throughout the novel, Sir Leicester's voice is characterized as being full of stately pomposity, but also as being "rich and mellow" (668). Following his stroke, however, Sir Leicester realizes that his ability to express himself may soon be lost, and he worries a great deal about
not being able to tell Lady Dedlock that they are on "unaltered terms" (698), as the following selections indicate:

"Volumnia, do I make myself intelligible? The words are not quite under my command, in the manner of pronouncing them" (697);

"Therefore, Volumnia, I desire to say in your presence . . . in case I should relapse, in case I should not recover, in case I should lose both my speech and the power of writing, though I hope for better things . . . ." (697)

The situation that Sir Leicester fears--being unable to communicate in speech or writing--is exactly the situation of the poor crossing-sweep Jo's daily existence. Jo represents how detached from society one can become when he lacks the ability to communicate in speech or writing. Jo's illiteracy renders him unable to find meaning in a world full of "all that unaccountable reading and writing" (199) and alienates him from the realm of literate intelligences to the extent that when Mr. Chadband is apparently trying to save Jo's soul, Jo believes he is about to give him a haircut. Jo's inarticulateness also greatly inhibits his being understood by Lady Dedlock: "What does the horrible creature mean?" (201). Clearly in Jo, Dickens is describing the profound consequences of being isolated from others by language [cf. Barrow's discussion of Colonel Sherburn (61 ff.) and Fish's discussion of Coriolanus (200 ff.)], and the point is made dramatically
clear in Dickens's likening of Jo to animals. Jo is not only compared with dogs and oxen (199) but actually equated with them: "Jo, and the other lower animals, get on in the unintelligible mess as they can" (199). But while this identification of Jo with animals implies that he is innocent (like animals, but unlike the consciously evil Chadband), it also reinforces his helplessness in making sense of the literate world. Jo's existence, in other words, can be accurately described as "nasty, poor, brutish, and short."

The allusion above is to Thomas Hobbes's description of the state of nature in his work *Leviathan*. According to Hobbes, the state of nature exists before men form a social contract in order to establish a commonwealth. Hobbes describes the state of nature as a brutal, static environment in which every person works only for his or her own selfish ends. In Jo's case, Charles Dickens is arguing that if society turns its back on people like Jo, if society denies them opportunity to its benefits, society will eventually regress to a barbaric age. What forces Jo to remain with the "other lower animals" is not a lack of virtue or industry on his part, but rather it is the barriers piled before him by society. In developing Jo's character, Dickens is not attacking merely philanthropic frauds or disease-ridden slums; instead, in Jo and in the entire novel, "it is now the very root-assumptions of that social order that Dickens is attacking and insisting must be destroyed" (Johnson 780). In
particular, Dickens is attacking the most fundamental constituent of society there is: language.

Society rests on a foundation of language; it is the most basic means of intercourse between people. Furthermore, as Dorothy Van Ghent has written, "Language is the index of behavior, the special machine which social man has made to register his attitudes and to organize his dealings with others" (127). Van Ghent’s mechanical metaphor seems especially apt for discussing the Victorian age of industrial growth, but the point I am making here is that, clearly, in Bleak House, Dickens is arguing that that machine is broken, and the resulting breakdown in communication between people is emblematic of the societal ills that Dickens so successfully describes in the novel. Moreover, as I have argued, what caused the machine to fail are the social barriers created by the unprecedented increase in literacy experienced in 19th century England. The rise of literacy, coupled with the technological advances and the political reforms of the time forced Victorians to rethink their views of the world, and in Bleak House the negative societal consequences of all these changes are emblemized by the wide variety of pernicious uses of language, and their effects on human beings. Many of the characters in Bleak House, whether they be suitors to Jarndyce and Jarndyce or victims of philanthropic frauds, find themselves in the metaphoric situation of Mrs. Flite’s birds; they, like the birds, are caged; but they are caged,
as it were, in a "prison-house of language," behind a wall of precedent, jargon, and "gammon" (180).

Those characters whose use of language attempts to injure others or fails to recognize their humanity are soundly castigated throughout Bleak House; those characters who are shown to be compassionate, positive forces are uniformly given clear and effective powers of expression. Rouncewell the Iron-master, for instance, who represents the new meritocracy of Victorian England, is described by Tulkinghorn as "a very good speaker. Plain and emphatic" (504). Also, Inspector Bucket, of whom Serlen has written "It is precisely Bucket's function to detect the objective reality masking the appearance. He has the ability to cut through the fog to the light" (quoted in Hutter 309n), possesses clear expressive powers, and is described by Dickens as having a subtly ingenious attitude towards the written word:

it happens that much correspondence is not incidental to his [Bucket's] life. He is no great scribe; rather handling his pen like the pocket-staff he carries about with him always convenient to his grasp; and discourages correspondence with himself in others, as being too artless and direct a way of doing delicate business. Further, he often sees damaging letters produced in evidence, and has occasion to reflect that it was a green thing to write them. For these reasons he has very little to
do with letters, either as sender or receiver.

(629)

Bucket is obviously aware of the fixity of the printed text, and its advantages and limitations. For while Bucket steadfastly refuses to allow himself to be pinned down by the writing of others, he makes a point of carrying with him a black pocket-book, described by Dickens as a "book of fate to many" (629). Also, Bucket functions not in the abstract, like the lawyers of Chancery, but in the "big, blooming, buzzing confusion" of daily life, a realm in which discretion and face-to-face interaction play a preeminent role; thus, like the wily man he is, he relies on the spoken word to get his business done, and Dickens makes it plain that he is very effective in his line of work.

And finally, without intending to intrude on the voluminous scholarship written on Esther Summerson, it should be pointed out that as a narrator, she too exhibits notable control of language [her narrative is, after all, a letter written to an "unknown friend" (767)], which, I claim, emblemizes her moral virtue. From her first words we find her to be highly conscientious about her task--e.g., "I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages . . ." (17)--and, in general, one of the surest judges of character in the novel. And even though her saccharine goodness may seem unrealistic at times, she is valuable as a moral touchstone by which the reader can judge other characters: "While her perfections may jar on the reader
after a time, it must be admitted that they are good qualifications for a narrator" (Grenander 305). Esther, in fact, expresses the overt moral of the novel in her description of her daily code of conduct to Mrs. Pardiggle: "I thought it best to be as useful as I could, and to render what kind services I could, to those immediately about me; and to try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself" (96). That this model of behavior is one that Dickens long believed in is evidenced by the fact that he makes essentially the same plea for beginning charitable work in the home as early as 1848. Humphrey House provides the following quotation from Dickens concerning the ill-fated Niger expedition (on which the Jellyby satire is based:

Gently and imperceptibly the widening circle of enlightenment must stretch and stretch, from man to man, from people on to people, until there is a girdle round the earth; but no convulsive effort, or far-off aim, can make the last great outer circle first, and then come home at leisure to trace out the inner one. Believe it, African Civilisation, Church of England Missionary, and all other Missionary Societies! The work at home must be completed thoroughly, or there is no hope abroad. To your tents, O Israel! but see they are your own tents! (89)

House astutely points out in writing of this passage that "Bleak House, in passing, enforces the same moral" (89), but
he does not mention the recurrence of the same image of ever-widening circles of influence in the words of Esther Summerson.

Great social satire, like *Bleak House*, survives its age because the targets of its satirical barbs are those human flaws which are reborn with each generation; thus, *Bleak House* continues to be relevant today, despite its many topical elements. Critics of the novel have recognized this fact and have striven to discern larger themes that engulf its four main contemporary issues (i.e. public charity, legal reform, parliamentary reform, and urban housing). Hobsbaum, for example, suggests that while Dickens’s topics of social analysis may vary, his "Theme is consistently an attack upon a System that refuses to take account of human needs" (149). Ikeler argues that the "governing images of rain and fog and accumulating papers suggest that the parent virus is stagnation or perversion of energy, manifested chiefly in the blight of the corporate will" (Ikeler 498). And finally, Hardy asserts that

We have to feel that workhouses, slums, filthy graveyards, poverty and servitude are all related to each other, and are permitted and created by stately homes, comfortable living, ceremony, wealth and privilege, which are also related to each other. The social analysis is on a large scale, and this means that it is an analysis. (12)
These three critics are representative of much commentary on Bleak House; each correctly realizes that what makes the novel great is not its call for topical reforms [many of the reforms Dickens argues for had already been made when Bleak House was published (Metz 18)], but its concern with deeper issues, its analysis of forces working beneath the institutional level.

Dorothy Van Ghent has noted that

Dickens lived in a time and an environment in which a full-scale demolition of traditional values was going on, correlative to the uprooting and dehumanization of men, women, and children by the millions—a process brought about by industrialization, colonial imperialism, and the exploitation of the human being as a "thing" or an engine or a part of an engine capable of being used for profit. (157-8)

One reason Bleak House speaks so eloquently to our generation is that we are experiencing a similar demolition of values and dehumanization based on analogically similar technological developments. And just as I have argued for the consideration of the role of orality and literacy studies in understanding Dickens’s work, we should realize that the same individual and institutional abuses of language that Dickens presents are still going on. In fact, because of the explosive growth of electronic mass communication in our century, the warning Dickens gives us in Bleak House to beware of the way society uses language is more applicable now than when Dickens wrote
the novel since there is now a greater diversity of media through which language can be transformed. By showing us the potential pitfalls society may encounter when it fully interiorizes a new medium of communication, Dickens exhibits remarkable foresight and insight, and truly merits Ezra Pound's description of the artist as "the antennae of the race" (quoted in McLuhan xi). Viewing Dicken's Bleak House in terms of orality and literacy immeasurably assists us in recognizing his vision.
WORKS CITED


Nadelhaft, Janice. "The English Malady, Corrupted Humors,


