The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby Study Guide

The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby by David Edgar

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Introduction

When it appeared on the London stage in 1980, David Edgar's *Nicholas Nickleby* became the longest play ever produced, and when it moved to a lavish production in New York for the eight-and-one-half hour theater endurance test (viewed either in one marathon sitting or in two long evenings), it boasted the most expensive theatre ticket price ever set, at $100 each. Edgar found himself identifying more and more with the Dickensian spirit of being "generously angry" as he worked on *Nicholas Nickleby*. This is a play that takes the social consciousness of the original Dickens novel to new dimensions, where audiences can be reminded of the need for social reform, as well as uplifted by the play's message. Edgar sees three avenues of success in his production: "First, it looks at adaptations in a new way. It says that a group of people with a strong view about the world can take a work of art and frame it and transform it in a way that makes the adaptation one not *of* the original work of art but *about* the original work of art. Point two . . . it's accessible; it's not obscure.... And the third point is that it was . . . on the side of the underdog for the entirety of its not inconsiderable length." The play combines Dickensian social realism with modern theatrical spectacle and genuine heart.

Author Biography

David Edgar was born in Birmingham, England, on February 26, 1948. His father, Barrie Edgar, was a television producer, and his mother had been an actress. Birmingham's proximity to Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-Upon-Avon meant that David saw numerous productions of Shakespeare plays as he grew up. He attended Oundle School, a liberal private school north of London, where he acted in and directed plays and discovered his passion for socialist politics. He went on to earn his bachelor of arts in drama from Manchester University, in 1969. Edgar briefly held a position as a journalist while beginning his career as a playwright. During and after college, he wrote and acted in numerous plays, and by 1973 he had produced his first television play, *The Eagle Has Landed*. As Edgar's socialist sentiments grew, he helped to found the Theatre Writer's Union (1975) and produced primarily *agitprop* plays, simple pieces with a socialist agenda. These plays most often ran in small theaters to little notice, and ultimately Edgar decided, as he explained in an interview with biographer Elizabeth Swain, that he needed the arena of the larger theater with its capacity for spectacle in order to convey complex "political questions which concern the relationship between historical events and the perceptions of the people who are passing through them." His chance came when his antifascist, antiracist play *Destiny* moved to the Aldwych Theatre in the fashionable West End theater district of London. Edgar's political insight was recognized, and he was courted by left-wing newspapers to write political essays.

Edgar soon established a parallel career as a political essayist and speaker, one that he continues to nourish alongside his prolific career as a playwright. Contacts with the prestigious Royal Shakespeare Company and a commission to produce Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby,* led to the 1980 production of his most successful work to date, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*. Before beginning to write his adaptation of the Dickens novel, Edgar met with directors Trevor Nunn and John Caird and a group of forty-five of the main actors over a period of five weeks, reading the Dickens novel together and discussing how to stage the play. The resulting eight-and-a-half-hour production fulfilled Edgar's goal for theatrical spectacle with a political message. Edgar was especially pleased when a reviewer likened him to Balzac, a French novelist known for epic novels that portrayed nineteenth-century society with all of its problems. Like Balzac, the reviewer said, Edgar "seems to be a secretary for our times." Edgar responded, "That defined rather more precisely than I'd ever defined before, what I'd like to be. I'd like to be a secretary for the times through which I am living. I'm an unreconstructed social realist, nineteenth-century social realist—or becoming one." David Edgar currently chairs the masters program in playwriting at Birmingham University.

Plot Summary

Part 1, Act 1

The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby briefly outlines the reasons that Nicholas Nickleby, his sister Kate, and their mother travel to London—because of the father's death—and then portrays a town meeting wherein a large muffin company ousts private "muffin boys" through a ruse of guaranteeing lower muffin prices to help the poor. Surveying the selling of the new company's stock is Nicholas's parsimonious uncle, Ralph Nickleby, to whom the now-destitute relatives turn for assistance. Ralph places Nicholas as an assistant in Dotheboys Hall, a Yorkshire boarding school, and Kate in a milliner's shop, coldly splitting them apart. Kate and Mrs. Nickleby move out of their temporary lodgings with the kind portrait artist, Miss La Creevy, and into one of Ralph's sparsely furnished rental homes. Nicholas is skeptical of the one-eyed schoolmaster, Mr. Wackford Squeers, with his appalling lack of knowledge and his gruff treatment of the charges, most of whom are illegitimate or disfigured. Nevertheless, Nicholas dares not question his employer until Squeers starts to beat Smike, a severely limited student whom Nicholas has befriended. In a fit of rage, Nicholas strikes Squeers, and Smike is able to make a getaway. Then Nicholas, too, departs, and Mrs. Squeers tends to her husband. Nicholas runs into John Browdie, a neighbor engaged to a friend of Squeers's daughter Fanny. John gives Nicholas a bear hug for beating the schoolmaster. Smike and Nicholas take the road back to London. Fanny writes a letter to Ralph Nickleby condemning Nicholas as having ruthlessly attacked both of her parents. In the meantime, Kate has been taken in by Madame Mantalini and her crew of milliners. Because she is young and pretty, Kate works with Miss Knag in the shop itself, awkwardly helping rich, spoiled, young women try on hats. Miss Knag befriends the young newcomer.

Part 1, Act 2

Newman Noggs, secretary to Ralph Nickleby, reads Fanny's letter and then goes to visit his downstairs neighbors, the Kenwigs. This family has three daughters and an infant named Lillyvick, named after Mrs. Kenwigs' uncle, a water-rate collector. Mrs. Kenwigs is obviously expecting another child. The family panders to Uncle Lillyvick, for he holds the key to their salvation, if he chooses to leave his inheritance to their girls, which will provide them with a reliable means of subsistence. Nicholas visits Noggs and tells him about his encounter with Squeers and then searches for new employment, temporarily acting as French tutor to the Kenwigs children. His mother does not know whether to believe her son or Ralph about Nicholas's attack of Squeers. However, Kate, who has by now replaced Miss Knag in the milliner's shop and incited her jealousy, has complete faith in her brother. He and his sister embrace, and he leaves with Smike for Portsmouth to find some means of supporting them all. Along the road, they meet the Crummles theatrical family, headed by Mr. Vincent Crummles and featuring the Crummles sons and daughter, otherwise known as the Infant Phenomenon, a girl of fifteen who has

been playing a ten-year-old for at least five years. Nicholas signs on to write a new piece for the company, for a weekly rate of one pound, and ends up playing Romeo, while Smike joins the troupe as the Apothecary. In the audience, Uncle Lillyvick falls in love with the actress Miss Petowker, and they marry, leaving the Kenwigs without a benefactor.

Madame Mantalini's business is about to be foreclosed, due to her husband's profligate ways. When she visits Ralph Nickleby for help, she discovers her husband trying to cash in some outstanding accounts he has stolen from her. She announces her intention to separate from him and says that she has taken steps to put the shop into Miss Knag's hands, a clever way to keep the shop from devolving to her husband, since a married woman cannot own property. Miss Knag now employs Madame as manager, and Mr. Mantolini is left in the cold. It is revealed that Ralph Nickleby had engineered the foreclosure and then stood ready to advance the money to salvage the shop, at a profitable rate of interest. With Miss Knag in charge, however, Nickleby's backing will no longer be needed, but Kate is fired.

The poisoning scene of *Romeo and Juliet,* beginning with the line, "Who calls so loud?" is played in tandem with the revelation that Ralph has arranged to have Kate act as hostess for a party at his house, where he will entertain several gentlemen with whom he does business. Smike's line, "My poverty and not my will consents" takes on added significance when applied to the juxtaposed scene of Kate having to fulfill her uncle's request despite her misgivings. She soon discovers that she is the evening's entertainment, when Sir Mulberry Hawk tries to seduce her. Ralph sees her to a carriage and realizes the terrible mistake he has made. He admonishes Hawk, but the latter aptly points out that Nickleby would have turned a blind eye had Lord Frederick Verisopht fancied the girl. In the meantime, Nicholas and Smike participate in a fantastically modified happy ending to *Romeo and Juliet,* in which, miraculously, almost everyone survives.

Part 2, Act 1

The second half of the play begins with a brief summary through narration of the events of part I and introduces a new plot line: a love interest for Nicholas. First, however, Kate briefly holds a position as a lady's companion and once again has to fight off the unwelcome advances of Hawk, as she accompanies her mistress to the opera. When Kate takes her complaint to her uncle, he asks her to endure the advances a little longer, until they find "another entertainment," in order not to spoil his relationship with them. She is horrified, but Noggs gives her the empathy she needs and sends for Nicholas. Nicholas heads for London the moment he gets the news, bringing Smike. Coincidentally, the pair arrives in a London coffeehouse only to overhear Hawk and Verisopht talking about Kate. A fight ensues, and Nicholas nearly kills Hawk with a horsewhip. The next day, Nicholas meets the charitable Mr. Charles and Mr. Ned Cheeryble, who enlist Nicholas to help a young, destitute girl, Madeline Bray, whose ailing father has squandered the family fortune. Nicholas has already met her when he goes to confront Nickleby for mistreating his sister, and he is in love. In the meantime,

Smike has been caught by Squeers, while wandering around London. Squeers locks him up, but John Browdie, in town on his wedding trip, frees the hapless boy.

Part 2, Act 2

In a coffee room, Nicholas thanks Browdie for saving Smike and meets the Cheeryble's amiable nephew, Frank Cheeryble, who will fall in love with Kate. Nicholas then visits the Kenwigs, whose latest child has arrived. Nicholas breaks the "good" news that Uncle Lillyvick has married an actress, which prompts resentment from Mr. Kenwigs for his "defrauded, swindled infants." Nicholas tells Noggs of his love for Madeline Bray, and Noggs very soon discovers a way to help both Nicholas and Madeline, when he overhears Ralph Nickleby plotting with Arthur Gride, an avaricious old moneylender, to forgive Bray's debts if he gives up his daughter to marry Gride. Nickleby stands to profit in the transaction because Gride has promised to leave his inheritance to Ralph. Noggs urges Nicholas to marry Madeline quickly, to save her from this fate, and Nicholas manages to do so, in the typical boy-gets-girl subplot, with an eleventh-hour appearance at her wedding. Things are looking up for everyone, as Kate and Frank fall in love and the Kenwigs welcome Uncle Lillyvick back to the fold, his erstwhile wife having eloped once again, this time with an itinerant actor. Everyone's fortune seems secure now, although Smike dies, seemingly of his unrequited love for Kate, in a heart-wrenching reprise of his apothecary scene. The bad guys get their due, too, for Squeers is arrested, Hawk shoots his former friend Verisopht and runs off to France, and Ralph commits suicide after learning that Smike is the son he thought he had sent away to the country years ago. Everyone is celebrating Christmas in the usual Dickens fashion, but Edgar adds a somber note to the story in the form of a new Smike, who shivers outside of their warm circle. As the curtain falls, Nicholas picks up and holds the boy in his arms.

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 1-7

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 1-7 Summary

Scene 1. Members of the company, speaking in turn, give the family background of the Nickleby family. Mr. Godfrey Nickleby married late in life, fathered two sons, received an unexpected inheritance, bought a farm, and upon his death left the older son a large sum of money, and the younger son a smaller sum of money and the farm. The older son, Ralph, went to the city and successfully pursued a career in money making, while the younger son stayed on the farm. Encouraged by his wife to learn from his older brother, the younger Mr. Nickleby put a lot of money into the markets. Unfortunately, he lost everything and soon died, leaving his wife, son Nicholas and daughter Kate to fend for themselves. Having heard nothing but good things about Ralph from Mr. Nickleby, the widow and the two children went immediately to London to seek his help. The members of the company portray the bustle of London as the next scene appears and the story begins in earnest.

Scene 2. At a public meeting in a tavern, Member of Parliament Sir Matthew Pupker faces angry muffin and crumpet sellers when he presents a report on the dismal state of the muffin and crumpet trade. He turns to businessman Mr. Bonney, who moves that the government enact a bill to create a publicly offered muffin and crumpet corporation. Pupker then turns to Ralph Nickleby, who seconds Bonney's motion. There is a chorus of votes in favor, and the motion is passed. Ralph leaves the meeting. This scene blends with the next as again members of the company portray the hustle and bustle of London through which Ralph makes his way as he goes to his office.

Scene 3. As he arrives at his office, Ralph is met by his clerk Newman Noggs, who gives Ralph a letter informing him of his brother's death, that his brother's family has arrived in town, and that they would like to see him. Bonney arrives with a request for Ralph's investment in the muffin corporation. Ralph offers a few hundred pounds, which he says he'll withdraw whenever it looks as though he'll make a profit. Bonney agrees and leaves. Ralph complains to himself that his brother's family is nothing to him; he's never seen them, and then again makes his way through the streets of London as this scene blends with the next.

Scene 4. Ralph arrives at the lodgings where his brother's family is living. He's met by the elderly Miss LaCreevy, a painter of miniature portraits who immediately invites Ralph to sit for her. He refuses just as Mrs. Nickleby, Nicholas and Kate come in.

Ralph quizzes Nicholas and Kate about their qualifications and willingness to work. Nicholas appears eager and intelligent, Kate appears demure and trusting, and both appear willing. Ralph agrees to try to find them jobs. He proposes that Nicholas take the position of assistant schoolmaster at a country school called Dotheboys Hall. Although the family is reluctant to be parted, they're realistic enough to know that they have to pay their way. Nicholas is also romantic enough to hope that at the school there will be

a young nobleman who will hire him on to be a private tutor, meet Kate, fall immediately in love with her, marry her, and provide them all with a living for the rest of their days. Ralph takes Nicholas to meet his new employer as this scene flows into the next.

Scene 5. At a tavern in the lower class end of London, Wackford Squeers, the headmaster of Dotheboys Hall, abuses two boys in his charge while he's waiting for his carriage. A man called Snawley arrives, and makes arrangements with Squeers to take his wife's two sons (from a previous marriage) to the school. Squeers and Snawley agree that the boys will stay at the school for as long as payments are regularly made.

Ralph and Nicholas come in just as Squeers and Snawley are completing their arrangements. Ralph persuades Squeers to take on Nicholas, who is relatively uneducated, as his assistant. Ralph warns Nicholas that any display of temper will cause him (Ralph) to withdraw assistance from Mrs. Nickleby and Kate. Squeers tells Nicholas to be ready to leave early the next morning.

Noggs arrives with a letter from Bonney for Ralph, and finds himself staring at Nicholas, who becomes uncomfortable under the attention. Ralph tells Nicholas to hurry home and prepare to leave. Nicholas does so, and this scene blends with the next.

Scene 6. Mrs. Nickleby and Kate help Nicholas pack, all three telling us how upset they are at having to part.

Scene 7. Nicholas arrives at the tavern, where Squeers is depriving the boys in his charge, including now two Snawley brothers, of their breakfast. Members of the company create the carriage from various set pieces (benches, tables, etc) as Squeers gets the boys on board and Mrs. Nickleby and Kate arrive to bid farewell to Nicholas. Noggs also appears, and secretly gives Nicholas a letter. Squeers shouts at Nicholas to hurry, Nicholas says one last goodbye to his mother and sister, and the stagecoach leaves.

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 1-7 Analysis

This script has been faithfully adapted from the novel *Nicholas Nickleby* by Charles Dickens in such a way as to capture not just its plots and themes, but also to create a vivid sense of the world in which the novel is set - London of the mid 1800's. It does so by incorporating narration, by telling the story in short scenes that quickly and smoothly blend into one another, and by linking those scenes through portrayals of London street life of the time. In short, this section of the play shows us how style can blend with substance to create an effective sense of atmosphere and storytelling.

A key aspect of Dickens' work in general is the detail and breadth of his characters. This is carefully maintained in this adaptation. Whether they appear throughout the play (Nicholas, Ralph, etc), irregularly (Miss La Creevy, Newman Noggs), or just once or twice (Bonney and many more to come), the characters are vibrantly detailed as individuals and become much more than mere stereotypes. In terms of the portrayal of the central characters, we see that Ralph is a powerful businessman, Nicholas a spirited

romantic youth, and Kate a wistful and demure young woman. There is more to each of these characters to be revealed - such as Nicholas' tendency towards outbursts of violence as foreshadowed by Ralph's threat of abandoning Kate and Mrs. Nickleby - but what we see to this point is more than enough to get our interest and the story rolling.

A second aspect of Dickens' work is that, in general, characters in his stories play out a complicated plot. Events follow each other quickly, which leads to a powerful forward movement to the story. This section of the play introduces us to this means of storytelling, as a great deal happens in a relatively short period of time. Combine this with the way in which the story is told, and we find ourselves caught up in a rushing momentum that again is similar to the rush of life in London at the time and also develops an exciting sense of theatricality. Again, style supports substance, and substance is illuminated by style.

A third aspect of Dickens' work is that his stories tend to be about the tensions between rich and poor. This is clearly true of *Nicholas Nickleby* (the book and the play). Almost everything that happens has something to do with someone either gaining or losing status because of their financial situation. In this sequence, for example, we see Ralph having a lot of status because he has a lot of money, Squeers manipulating situation after situation so he can acquire a lot of money and status, Nicholas and his family forced to do things they don't want to because they don't have money and therefore have no status, etc. This sets up the foundations for dramatic conflict and thematic development later in the play, which is in many ways a comedy but still has a very serious point to make - that the poor and under-privileged are entitled to freedom, compassion and understanding the same as anyone else.

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 8-9

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 8-9 Summary

Scene 8. As Kate poses for Miss LaCreevy, they discuss Ralph and how uneasy Kate feels around him. Shortly afterwards, Ralph himself comes calling. As Mrs. Nickleby appears, Ralph announces that he's found a position for Kate, working for a milliner and dressmaker. Mrs. Nickleby asks Kate whether she's got anything to say to her uncle. Kate says she does, but insists upon saying it in private. They move away from Mrs. Nickleby and Miss LaCreevy, and Kate asks whether she's to live at home. Ralph confesses that he had the idea of finding Mrs. Nickleby a place in the country, but when Kate insists upon living with her mother he agrees to find someplace small for them in town. Kate begins to cry out of gratitude and relief, but Ralph tells her roughly to stop.

Scene 9. Nicholas, Squeers and the Boys arrive at Dotheboys Hall, which Squeers says is the more impressive sounding name he uses for the place when he's in the city. Here it doesn't really have a name at all. As Nicholas tells us of his anxious forebodings, Squeers summons Smike, a lame and mentally disabled young man of nineteen, and orders him to take the baggage in. Meanwhile Mrs. Squeers appears and greets her husband with information about the livestock. Squeers introduces Nicholas, who watches as Smike is abused by Squeers and Mrs. Squeers goes through the lengthy list of troublesome boys at the school. When Squeers, Mrs. Squeers and Smike are gone, Nicholas reads the letter from Noggs, in which Noggs says that if Nicholas is ever in London he can take shelter in at his home. Nicholas finishes the letter, crumples to the floor, and sobs.

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 8-9 Analysis

In this short section we see Nicholas and Kate start their new lives, and we also see two key relationships begin, both of which develop throughout the play.

The first is between Nicholas and Smike, the most important relationship in the play for two reasons. Firstly, many events of the plot take place because of Nicholas' feelings of protectiveness for Smike and/or because of Smike's feelings of devotion for Nicholas. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, their relationship plays out the story's central theme - that the pursuit compassion and love are more important and lead to greater happiness and fulfillment than the pursuit of monetary gain.

This theme also plays out in the second relationship, which is between Ralph and Kate. We begin to see the beginnings of a perhaps inappropriate attraction that Ralph feels towards Kate, an attraction that causes trouble for her later. We also see Kate fight for what is important to her (staying with her mother, loving and taking care of her) in the face of Ralph's more profit oriented goals for both the Nickleby women. This is another illustration of the central theme.

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 10-19

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 10-19 Summary

Scene 10. This is the first of several scenes detailing the unpleasant life at Dotheboys Hall. We see the boys dosed with a primitive medicine meant to suppress their appetite so the Squeers' can spend less money on food, we see Squeers read letters from home, all of which appear to encourage Squeers to discipline the boys even harder than he already does, we see Squeers lead a spelling lesson, in which he teaches the boys to spell incorrectly, and we see two of the boys kept behind for whippings, which we don't actually see. Narration tells us that Nicholas felt even worse about his position than he did when he arrived.

Scene 11. Fanny Squeers, daughter of Squeers and Mrs. Squeers, arrives, accompanied by her friend Tilda Price and Tilda's fiancy, a rough country man named John Bowdie. Fanny and Tilda are quickly revealed to be silly, spoiled, snobs.

Scene 12. As Squeers and Mrs. Squeers discuss Nicholas, Fanny becomes intrigued. She's jealous of Tilda's engagement, and is in a hurry to become engaged herself.

Scene 13. Nicholas discovers Smike alone, and gives him a proper spelling lesson. They're interrupted by Fanny, who says she's looking for her father but uses the opportunity to flirt with Nicholas.

Scene 14. Back in London, Newman Noggs arrives at Miss LaCreevy's to take Mrs. Nickleby and Kate to their new home. Miss LaCreevy tearfully waves goodbye.

Scene 15. Nicholas, Fanny, Tilda and John have tea in Squeers' parlor while Squeers is away. John comments on the lack of food given to the students and other teachers at the Hall. Out of loyalty, Nicholas defends his employer. The highly-strung Fanny bursts into tears. To save the situation, Tilda proposes that they all play cards.

Unaware of Fanny's feelings for him, Nicholas partners with Tilda, which angers Fanny. Fanny gets even angrier when Tilda and Nicholas win, and says some things that make John think that Tilda is actually flirting with Nicholas. John leaves the game, orders Tilda to come with him, and goes out. Tilda follows him out crying. As Nicholas tells us how completely bewildered he is by this turn of events, Fanny confides in a servant girl, who comforts her by saying that Tilda was both vain and plain. Fanny defends Tilda, who returns to say that she and John had a huge fight, made up, agreed to get married as soon as possible and want Fanny to be a bridesmaid. Fanny happily embraces Tilda, but then Tilda starts talking about Nicholas, which upsets Fanny again, which upsets Tilda again, which makes Fanny apologize again, and which makes them both cry again.

Scene 16. Noggs shows Kate and Mrs. Nickleby their depressing new home.

Scene 17. While out on a walk through the school's gardens, Nicholas meets Fanny and Tilda, who stage a little scene which ends with Fanny fainting into Nicholas' arms. Nicholas apologizes for being the cause of so much tension the night before, and asks whether he's correct in assuming that Fanny's in love with him. Fanny admits it's true and tells Tilda that she's sure Nicholas feels the same way about her. Nicholas blurts out that he feels nothing of the kind, and that his feelings wouldn't change if he saw her hundreds of times. Fanny bursts into tears, while Tilda laughs at her for making a fool of herself. Fanny then tells Mrs. Squeers that Nicholas refused her. Mrs. Squeers yells at Nicholas, and then takes her anger out on Smike by smacking him.

Scene 18. Nicholas and Smike have another lesson, but Smike isn't doing very well, which makes him cry with frustration. When Nicholas mentions he's planning to leave, Smike begs to be allowed to find him. Nicholas agrees, and promises to help him in any way he can. Nicholas moves away and starts a letter to Kate, but is so overcome with emotion that he can't finish.

Scene 19. The next morning, Nicholas is called down to breakfast by Squeers, who tells him that Smike has disappeared and asks whether Nicholas knows where he is. Nicholas admits that it's likely that Smike has run away. Mrs. Squeers hints that when he's caught, his punishment will be severe.

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 10-19 Analysis

The key element of this section is the development of Nicholas. To this point he's been clearly but sketchily drawn - a young man, idealistic, napve and loyal. In this sequence of scenes, however, we see how idealistic (about what he believes the boys' education should be), napve (about male/female relationships in general, and Fanny's feelings in particular), and loyal (to his family) he really is. We also see how his passion for honesty and acting/speaking impulsively gets him into trouble, something that foreshadows events at the end of this act and throughout the rest of the play. We also see the beginnings of deeper feeling, particularly compassion for Smike. This section, in fact, marks the true beginning of Nicholas' journey of transformation. He's already begun the journey through the events of his life. In this section, his journey towards true maturity begins. This manifests at this point in his growing compassion for Smike and resentment about how he's treated.

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 20-25

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 20-25 Summary

Scene 20. Narration introduces us to Kate's new place of work, Madame Mantalini's millinery shop. Madame Mantalini is a well-dressed middle-aged woman, while Mr. Mantalini (who changed his name from Muntle) is a fancy dresser, younger than Madame Mantalini, and melodramatic in his way of speaking. As Kate arrives the Mantalinis are arguing, but they stop when Kate presents a letter of introduction from Ralph. Madame Mantalini hires her, promises a good salary, and tells her to never pay any attention to what Mr. Mantalini says.

Scene 21. Kate is introduced to Miss Knag, the workroom supervisor. Miss Knag introduces her to the other women in the workroom, who welcome her warmly. Soon afterwards a Rich Lady and her Daughter arrive. Miss Knag asks Kate to assist her with fitting them, but Kate is so inexperienced, awkward and nervous that the fitting goes badly and Kate is verbally abused by the rich women. Madame Mantalini is inclined to fire her, but Miss Knag insists that she stay.

Scene 22. Back at Dotheboys, Smike has been captured and begs for forgiveness from Squeers. Squeers doesn't listen, and starts to whip him. Nicholas tries to stop the whipping but Squeers still doesn't listen. Nicholas tries again, and Squeers strikes him across the face. Nicholas grabs Squeers, strikes him, and then grabs the whipping stick and beats him with it. Fanny and Mrs. Squeers try to stop Nicholas, the boys gather round and cheer Nicholas on, and Smike disappears. Nicholas runs after him, the boys run after *him*, and Mrs. Squeers and Fanny comfort Squeers.

Scene 23. In the countryside near Dotheboys, Nicholas encounters John Bowdie, who congratulates Nicholas on beating Squeers and offers money so he can get away. John goes off laughing, and Nicholas follows him..

Scene 24. Fanny writes a letter to Ralph, telling him about Nicholas' attack on Squeers, exaggerating Squeers' injuries and calling Nicholas a monster. As she finishes an old man named Brooker appears, looking for his son - a student at the hall. Fanny ignores him and runs out.

Scene 25. On a country road to London, Nicholas encounters Smike, who falls to his knees and begs to go with him. "You are my home," he says. For a moment Nicholas isn't sure what to do, then helps Smike to his feet and goes off with him.

Part 1, Act 1, Scenes 20-25 Analysis

Action in the two central plotlines - Kate at the milliner's and Nicholas at the school - mirrors each other in this section. The Mantalinis are by no means the monsters of insensitivity that Mr. and Mrs. Squeers are, but because they're so wrapped up in the

dramas of their own relationship they are as oblivious in their own way to the truth of what's going on in front of them. The larger parallel between the two plotlines is that Kate is rescued from abuse by Miss Knag, while Smike is rescued from abuse by Nicholas. These are two clear examples of the play's dominant theme of compassion, and illustrate the pervasive need for compassion in the society of Dickens' time.

Part of the power of this play lies in the fact that many of the social problems Dickens is commenting on still exist and probably will always exist, which makes his work transcendent of the time and place in which it's set. Specifically, throughout the play, but particularly in this scene, Smike represents the poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged. In his begging for compassion from Nicholas, he gives voice to an entire underclass of London society of the time - a voice that can still be heard today in the voices of street people, the mentally and/or physically disabled, or any disenfranchised citizens in the London-like big cities in this day and age of extreme economic and social imbalance.

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 1-3

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 1-3 Summary

Scene 1. Noggs reads the letter from Fanny. He's interrupted by Crowl, a neighbor, who reminds him he's expected at the anniversary party going on downstairs. Crowl volunteers to stay behind and keep an eye on Noggs' fire (which really means that Crowl is going to keep warm at Noggs' expense) and Noggs joins the party.

Scene 2. Mr. and Mrs. Kenwigs introduce Noggs to the rest of their family (including their daughter Morleena) and other guests (including Miss Petowker, an actress). Mr. Kenwigs tries to get a parlor game going, but Mrs. Kenwigs they're waiting for her uncle, a wealthy man named Lillyvick from whom Mr. Kenwigs expects to inherit a fortune.

Mr. Lillyvick soon arrives; Mr. Kenwigs introduces him around the party and encourages Morleena to be especially nice to her uncle. He encourages her to perform for him, and Mrs. Kenwigs suggests that Miss Petowker should also perform. Miss Petowker agrees, but just as she's getting started Crowl comes with news that two men, both covered in mud, are at the door and are asking for Noggs. Noggs goes out curiously, then hurries back, grabs a candle, and leaves again.

The haughty Mr. Lillyvick is offended by such apparent bad manners and starts to leave. Mr. Kenwigs desperately pleads with him to stay, and Mr. Lillyvick changes his mind. The party is resuming when suddenly there are loud screams from offstage. Mrs. Kenwigs is immediately afraid for her baby, but Nicholas rushes on with the baby in his arms. He tells Mrs. Kenwigs that the girl they were paying to look after the baby fell asleep and accidentally lit her hair on fire. That was the cause of the screaming, but the baby is safe. The Kenwigs' ask Nicholas to stay, but he says he's tired and dirty and wants to rest. As he leaves, Lillyvick describes him as aristocratic. The Kenwigs' lead the party into dinner, with Lillyvick walking arm in arm with Miss Petowker.

Scene 3. Nicholas reads Fanny's letter and wants to go immediately to Ralph to explain. Noggs tells him that Ralph hasn't read the letter yet because he's out of town on business. He reminds Nicholas of Ralph's promise to cut Kate and Mrs. Nickleby off from all support if Nicholas ruined his situation at Dotheboys, urges him to find another position soon, and offers him a place to stay for the night. Nicholas gratefully accepts the advice and the offer of shelter, and comments that he's got three friends in the world - Noggs, Smike, and John Bowdie.

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 1-3 Analysis

Yet another aspect of Dickens' work is the appearance of scenes, characters and sub-plots that may not seem to have anything to do with the story as a whole when they first appear but which play an important role later. This is the case with the scene involving the Kenwigs family, which appears here to be a significant diversion from the main plot.

Later in the play, the Kenwigs, Lillyvick and Miss Petowker all play a more important role in the action. In fact, their sub-plot (particularly Mr. Kenwigs' obsession with Lillyvick's status) illustrates again the play's theme of compassion vs. greed.

The fact that Ralph hasn't yet read Fanny's letter sets up a sense of suspense that threads through the following few scenes. We become anxious to learn what he's going to do when he does read it.

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 4-7

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 4-7 Summary

Scene 4. Nicholas tells us that he went to visit Sir Matthew Pupker (the muffin politician from the first scene) in the hopes of getting a job. Pupker is distracted by a delegation from his political district, which presents him with a list of complaints about the way he does his job. Pupker dodges every concern, and ultimately refuses to resign when asked. The delegation leaves, and Nicholas is finally alone with him. When Pupker discovers that Nicholas is related to Ralph, he sees him in a more positive light and begins a long list of all the duties Nicholas will have to undertake. The list sounds to Nicholas a lot like things Pupker should be doing himself, but when he asks what Pupker will be doing while he's doing all the work, Pupker loses his temper and kicks him out.

Scene 5. At the Mantalinis' workshop, Kate is still under the watchful and fond eye of Miss Knag when an elderly lord and his young fiancy arrive to try on wedding bonnets. Madame Manatalini and Miss Knag attend her, but the young fiancy' asks for Kate, since she doesn't like working with "old frights" like Miss Knag. Miss Knag fetches Kate from the workroom, angrily accuses her of manipulating her way into Madame Mantalini's affections, and sends her upstairs. Kate has no choice but to go. Miss Knag collapses into a chair and announces that she now hates Kate.

Scene 6. After the confrontation with Pupker, Nicholas returns despondently to Noggs' rooms. Noggs, however, has good news. He's arranged with the Kenwigs for Nicholas to tutor their children. Nicholas eagerly accepts the job, goes downstairs to officially meet the Kenwigs, and finds everybody who was at the party - including Mr. Lillyvick and Miss Petowker. Just as Nicholas begins his lesson, Noggs interrupts with the bad news that Ralph has returned early, has seen the letter from Fanny, and has gone straight to Mrs. Nickleby's. Nicholas excuses himself and rushes to aid his mother.

Scene 7. Ralph confronts a disbelieving Kate and Mrs. Nickleby with the information contained in Fanny's letter, information confirmed by Nicholas when he arrives. Ralph demands that Nicholas return Smike to Squeers, but when Nicholas refuses, Ralph announces that not only will he no longer support Nicholas in any way, he will no longer support any of his family. Nicholas realizes that to save Kate and his mother, he has to leave. He doesn't know where he's going or what he'll do, but promises that as he searches for his destiny he'll always remember his loving sister and mother. He bids them farewell, promising Ralph that he will return.

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 4-7 Analysis

Once again Nicholas' honesty and directness get him into trouble, this time with Pupker. This suggests that another aspect of Nicholas' journey of transformation is to learn when to rein in his temper and opinions.

Pupker, Fanny Squeers, Lillyvick and the Kenwigs all represent the superficiality that comes along with pursuing money and status at the expense of integrity and kindness. Over and over again their concerns appear silly and trivial in comparison to what's happening with Nicholas and his family, and as such satirize the ambitions and drives of the upper classes. This reinforces the story's theme that places compassion and relationship above the pursuit of money and status.

An individual going out into the world to seek his fortune is a common plot element in several Dickensian stories. *Oliver Twist, David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* are among the more popular of his novels that contain this element. This suggests that the idea of trusting in faith and the personal resources of character and courage are important thematic elements in this and other Dickensian stories.

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 8-11

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 8-11 Summary

Scene 8. Narration tells us that on a foggy morning in early spring, Noggs said farewell as Nicholas and Smike set off on their journeys. Nicholas refuses to tell Noggs where he's going as he doesn't really know himself. When they're far enough away, however, and Noggs has disappeared from view, Nicholas tells Smike that they're heading for the seaside town of Portsmouth where they could conceivably get a job on board a ship. Later in their journey, as they rest by the side of the road, Nicholas tries to help Smike remember his life before Dotheboys. Smike remembers a large, lonesome room with a hook in the ceiling, and tells Nicholas that he can't remember two days together when he hasn't been afraid.

Scene 9. In a roadside tavern, Nicholas and Smike learn with dismay that not only is it still twelve miles to Portsmouth, but the Landlord has neither food nor shelter he can give them. As they prepare to move on, they encounter Vincent Crummles, a theatrical producer and actor who offers them a ride. He adds that the instant he saw Nicholas and Smike he immediately thought they'd do well on the stage - Nicholas as a romantic lead, Smike as a pathetic supporting character. He offers Nicholas the opportunity to act and to adapt new plays for the company, promising them each a pound a week. Members of the Company create a coach for Crummles and the others out of props and set pieces including a set of washtubs that, in an early example of product placement, must be included in all future productions.

Scene 10. A large company of actors, including Mrs. Crummles and the Infant Phenomenon (the Crummles' daughter who's in her late teens but is forced to act much younger) greets Nicholas and Smike when they arrive at Portsmouth. As Crummles introduces the company and the newcomers to each other, he tells Nicholas that in addition to writing the new play, he's to study some of the great classical parts like Romeo and Cassio. As soon as the members of the company discover that Nicholas is a playwright, they all start asking him which parts they'll be playing in the new play. Nicholas happily tells them, and soon afterwards is again flirted with by two women, Miss Snevellicci and Miss Ledbrook.

Scene 11. Kate is alone when two rough-looking men called Scaley and Tix arrive to take repossess the Mantalinis' belongings. As Kate summons Madame Mantalini, and Madame Mantalini summons Mr. Mantalini, Scaley and Tix go through the Mantalinis' things and reveal that they're to be taken in lieu of cash payment for a debt. Melo-dramatic and over-wrought, Mr. Mantalini gets a pair of scissors and threatens to kill himself. The Mantalinis and two Milliners, from whom Mr. Mantalini stole the scissors, chase each other across the stage and perhaps even into the auditorium before Mr. Mantalini can finally be restrained. Scaley picks up the scissors, the Mantalinis leave, and Narration tells us that within the day the business was closed, that the next day

reopened under different management, and that all the milliners were hired back ... except, Miss Knag tells us with some satisfaction, for Kate.

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 8-11 Analysis

The first scene of this section deepens the relationship between Nicholas and Smike. We see Nicholas continue to earn Smike's affection and trust, which serves to reinforce the theme of connection and compassion. The theme is also reinforced when Crummles offers not only a ride but also employment. Structurally, the placement of Crummles' generosity next to another example of how Nicholas' compassion creates happiness in Smike's life suggests that such compassion is not just fulfilling, but will be rewarded.

The scenes with the Crummles company reinforce that theme even further. Nicholas and Smike find themselves a kind of home with the company - safety, fulfillment, and affection. It's not going too far to suggest that in many ways and in spite of his being parted from his family, at this stage in his journey Nicholas is at his happiest. It's ironic, then, that his happiness is juxtaposed with Kate's ongoing misery as she becomes the scapegoat for someone else's (i.e. Miss Knag's) unhappiness. This is the beginning of a repeated pattern for Kate as she becomes the victim, again and again, of someone else's selfishness and betrayal.

The scene with the Mantalinis combines elements of farce (the chase with the scissors) with elements of melodrama (the evil men appearing, seemingly out of nowhere, to take away all the Mantalinis' worldly goods). There is more to Scaley and Tix than meets the eye, which we'll see in a scene or two.

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 12-15

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 12-15 Summary

Scene 12. Miss Snevellicci and Nicholas canvas for financial support for the company. Their first stop is the home of the Curdles, who are reluctant to offer their support - until Miss Snevellicci introduces Nicholas as a playwright. The Curdles, who are theatre snobs, make a sizeable donation. When Miss Snevellicci and Nicholas return to the Crummles, they find Mr. Crummles has engaged an actress from London, and a part in the new play must be written for her. The actress is Miss Petowker, who recognizes Nicholas from the Kenwigs.' She greets him happily, but hints to Mrs. Crummles that there should be no mention of their previous relationship. Mrs. Crummles agrees, and invites Nicholas to join them for dinner.

Scene 13. Mr. Mantalini sells Ralph the outstanding bills from the millinery shop in order to pay his personal debts. Before Ralph can hand over the cash, however, Madame Mantalini and Miss Knag arrive, announce that Miss Knag has purchased the company, debts and all, and is prepared to work with Madame Mantalini to re-establish the business. Madame Mantalini also announces that she's separating from Mr. Mantalini, and that from now on he's dealing with his debts on his own. Mr. Mantalini asks Ralph for help, but he refuses to give it. Soon afterwards Ralph is visited by Scaley and Tix, who present him with an inventory from the Mantalinis and ask for payment. Ralph gives them their wages and congratulates them on a job well done.

Scene 14. At the close of the first performance of Nicholas' new play, he's visited backstage by Mr. Lillyvick, who tells him that he's fallen in love with Miss Petowker and is about to marry her. When Nicholas offers his congratulations, Lillyvick confides that he's worried about how the Kenwigs' would react, seeing as how the inheritance they're all expecting is now to be Miss Petowker's. To avoid confrontation with the Kenwigs, Mr. Lillyvick has arranged to marry Miss Petowker that night after the performance, and invites Nicholas to join them. Nicholas accepts, and then goes out to take another bow.

Scene 15. On the morning of the wedding Miss Petowker and Mr. Lillyvick are both nervous, but are calmed down by their friends. They arrive at the Crummles' and are married, but as the celebration continues Nicholas slips away. He's anxious to learn the role of Romeo, which is about to be performed for the first time, and to make sure that Smike knows his role of the Apothecary well enough.

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 12-15 Analysis

In this section it seems as though everybody makes tradeoffs of integrity in the name of achieving money and status. Nicholas and Miss Snevellicci accept money from Mr. Curdle in exchange for agreeing to write the kind of play he wants, Crummles aims to increase the money making power of his company by engaging a "star" from London,

the arrangements between Miss Knag, the Mantalinis and Ralph are entirely about who can get how much money from whom and who can gain status over whom, and Lillyvick is afraid his status with the Kenwigs (who are themselves afraid of a decrease in status if they don't get Lillyvick's money) will decrease when they learn all his money will go to Miss Petowker. It's significant that after all of these convolutions play out, Nicholas abandons it all to go and be a true friend to Smike. Once again, Nicholas enacts the play's theme of valuing compassion and friendship over profit.

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 16-17

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 16-17 Summary

Scene 16. As Nicholas rehearses the scene in which Romeo purchases poison from the Apothecary (played by Smike), Ralph meets with Pupker and Bonney (from the muffin company) in his office. Ralph tells Bonney that he's pulling his investment out of the company at considerable profit to himself but a considerable loss to the company. Bonney protests that the company will no longer be able to function, but Ralph is unmoved. He dismisses Bonney and Pupker, then leaves.

As Nicholas and Smike rehearse the scene in which Romeo persuades the Apothecary to ignore his conscience and take the money for the poison, Ralph visits Kate and invites her to be hostess at a party he's giving the next night for some high-bred gentlemen. Kate is reluctant, but is persuaded by her mother, who reminds her about Ralph's high status.

As Nicholas continues to teach Smike his lines about the need for money over-ruling conscience, Ralph meets with the sexually and financially greedy Sir Mulberry Hawk, and promises that there will be attractions other than a good business deal at the party the following evening.

Scene 17. Ralph introduces Kate to Sir Mulberry, Sir Mulberry's younger friend Lord Frederick Verisopht, and a couple of their acquaintances, Pluck and Pyke. Ignoring Kate's discomfort, Hawk and Verisopht joke that her presence almost makes the extra interest Ralph is charging them worthwhile. Seeing Kate getting more uncomfortable as the jokes get raunchier, Hawk interrupts; expressing the belief that Kate is hoping someone in the room will pay attention to her. In spite of Kate's denials, Hawk bets that Kate can't look him in the face and deny that that's exactly what she was hoping. Verisopht accepts the bet. Kate begs Ralph to intervene but he refuses. She refuses to play Hawk's game, but he and Verisopht goad her into it. She stares Hawk straight in the eye and says nothing ... then her nerves get the better of her and she runs away in tears. Ralph, Hawk, Verisopht, and the others go down to dinner, leaving Kate alone.

The Crummles Company (with Miss Snevellecci as Juliet) enters, circles Kate, and performs the scene from *Romeo and Juliet* in which Juliet's father shouts angrily about her reluctance to marry whom she's told to marry.

The company disappears as Hawk returns and tries to get Kate to submit to his desires. Just as she's fighting him off Ralph returns and lets her go to her carriage. Hawk accuses Ralph of using Kate as bait to lure Verisopht into a financial arrangement. Ralph admits that's true, but counters that that he knew that Verisopht had enough good character to not try to take advantage of Kate the way Hawk did. Their argument is interrupted by Verisopht, who wants them to come down to dinner. Before they go down Ralph quickly and ruthlessly negotiates a loan for Verisopht at a high rate of interest.

The action returns to *Romeo and Juliet* - the scene in which Romeo (played by Nicholas) is told that Juliet is dead, and vows with the help of the Apothecary to die next to her.

Kate, Ralph and Noggs narrate how, at the moment Kate left Ralph's, Ralph saw a resemblance to his dead younger brother, Kate's father, in Kate's face - and that he noticed that Kate looked the same way her father looked when grieving and hurt. We're then told how Ralph staggered back to his house as though he had literally seen a ghost.

Part 1, Act 2, Scenes 16-17 Analysis

The craving for money and status drives Ralph to extreme choices in this section. First, he withdraws his money from the muffin corporation even though the corporation still needs it, and then prostitutes Kate to gain influence and money from Verisopht. There's no actual sex involved, but using one person to get something from another in order to gain profit for oneself is still prostitution. On some level Ralph's intentions aren't entirely evil. We believe him when he said that he trusted Verisopht to not go into the area of sexual impropriety. We believe this because we know from earlier scenes that Ralph is attracted to Kate. His anger at Hawk and the story of his vision of his brother suggest to us that his attraction has become something deeper.

Nevertheless, what Ralph does is still extreme, and tells us a great deal about the lengths to which he'll go to make a profit. It also illustrates how the innocent (i.e. Kate) can be hurt when lust for money and status overwhelms compassion and sensitivity. In other words, the way Kate is treated by Ralph is exactly the opposite of how Smike is treated by Nicholas. This means that watching the negativity of the Kate/Ralph relationship increases the impact felt on us as we watch the positive developments of the Nicholas/Smike relationship.

The parallel scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* illuminate and illustrate the action of these scenes. The dialogue rehearsed by Nicholas and Smike suggests that Ralph is in fact ignoring his conscience in favor of making money, Juliet's behavior being condemned by her father suggests that Ralph is condemning Kate for hers, and Romeo's determination to die alongside Juliet suggests that Ralph cares for Kate and shares in her humiliation.

The vision Ralph has of his brother is similar to another ghostly vision in another Dickens story - the vision that Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* has of Jacob Marley the night before he's visited by Marley's ghost. How much Ralph is actually affected by this vision from his past will be seen in Part 2.

Part 1, Act 2, Scene 18

Part 1, Act 2, Scene 18 Summary

Scene 18. The Crummles Company performs the final scene of their version of *Romeo and Juliet*. "Paris" arrives at the Capulet tomb and hides as "Romeo" opens the tomb to look for "Juliet." Paris challenges Romeo, they fight, and Paris is killed. Romeo sees Juliet and "Tybalt," both dead, drinks the poison he purchased from the Apothecary, and dies. From then on the action diverges significantly from that in Shakespeare.

Juliet awakes and sees that Romeo is dead. In despair she grabs Paris' dagger and is about to kill herself when Romeo awakes, the poison from the Apothecary having merely put him to sleep. As Romeo and Juliet profess their love, Juliet's family arrives and are overjoyed to see that Juliet is actually alive. They're even more overjoyed when they see that Paris isn't actually dead either. Romeo's killing blow glanced off his armor.

Romeo's family arrives, and just as he's embracing his Little Sister (a character who isn't in the original play portrayed by the Infant Phenomenon), Friar Lawrence arrives with news that Mercutio (who was apparently killed a few acts earlier) isn't dead either! Mercutio reveals that after being stabbed by Tybalt he was taken to a nearby town and treated by highly skilled doctors who saved his life. Friar Lawrence brings other news, that Benvolio, a kinsman of Romeo's and friend of Mercutio's, is in fact a woman!

With everybody who was thought dead now miraculously alive (everybody except Tybalt), the Crummles Company takes its curtain call and sings a happy song to the glory of England, its industry, its wealth, and joy. This final tableau for *Romeo and* Juliet transforms into a final tableau for *this* play as other characters from other aspects of the story appear - Kate and Mrs. Nickleby, Squeers and the Dotheboys students, the Mantalinis, Pupker, Hawk, Verisopht and Ralph representing the wealthy industrial classes, Crowl, Noggs and Brooker representing the downtrodden lower classes.

Part 1, Act 2, Scene 18 Analysis

The tension of the previous few scenes releases here into pure fun, as the liberties taken with Shakespeare's original text for *Romeo and Juliet* become more and more absurd. In the original, Romeo, Juliet, Paris and Mercutio all remain dead, while Benvolio is not revealed to be a woman and there is no final song. Changing the endings of tragedies like *Romeo and Juliet* was common in the theatre of this period. Producers like Mr. Crummles believed that audiences didn't want and didn't like to see tragic endings, so they altered the original plays to suit these beliefs.

The song sung by the company is ironic, in that it celebrates the value of industry and of making money. This illustrates how even popular entertainment of the day contributed to the perpetuation of the economic, social and political status quo. This sets up the action

in the second half of the play in which Nicholas discovers, and begins to live, the truth of the play's theme - that compassion and friendship is by far more rewarding.

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 1-8

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 1-8 Summary

Scene 1. The company recounts the action that took place in the previous play.

Scene 2. At the theatre in Portsmouth, the Crummles Company has just finished another successful performance. One of the senior actors, Folair, takes Nicholas aside and expresses his curiosity about his and Smike's true origins and names. Before Nicholas can answer, Folair tells him that Mr. Lenville, another senior actor, is concerned that he's not getting the applause he used to since Nicholas arrived. Lenville announces his intention to "pull Nicholas' nose" before the entire company, but before he can do so Nicholas knocks him to the floor and demands that he apologize, which Lenville reluctantly does. As the rest of the company leaves, Nicholas confesses to Smike that he's anxious about Kate, and wishes he were at home.

Scene 3. Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Frederick Verisopht wake up groggily after a night of too much revelry. Verisopht admits to thinking a lot about Kate, which makes Hawk suggest that they go to Ralph's and find out where she lives.

Scene 4. Kate and Mrs. Nickleby visit an invalid named Mrs. Wititterly, who's advertised for a companion. As they're being interviewed, Mr. Wititterly appears and tells them that his wife is extremely sensitive and must never over-exert herself. Mrs. Wititterly decides that Kate would be the perfect companion, and Mr. Wititterly asks if she can start tomorrow. As they leave Mrs. Nickleby imagines what would happen if Mrs. Wititterly were to die, leaving Mr. Wititterly alone and available.

Scene 5. Verisopht and Hawk, accompanied by Pluck and Pyke, attempt to convince Ralph to give them Kate's address. Speaking privately to Verisopht, Ralph convinces him to keep the address from Hawk. Just then Mrs. Nickleby arrives with the news of Kate's new position. Ralph introduces her to Verisopht and Hawk, who ask about Kate's health. Mrs. Nickleby mentions that Kate and her new employers will be attending the opera the next evening. Hawk looks meaningfully at Pluck and Pyke, who then offer to escort a grateful Mrs. Nickleby home. Once they go, Ralph mentions in an aside that he wonders about the wisdom of putting Kate in this position, but decides that she has to fend for herself.

Scene 6. As they escort Mrs. Nickleby to where she'll catch her bus home, Pluck and Pyke announce that they'll be attending the opera as well, in the company of Hawk, who they say holds Mrs. Nickleby in the highest regard. They invite Mrs. Nickleby to join them. Mrs. Nickleby gratefully accepts, and as the omnibus takes her home, imagines Kate marrying Hawk.

Scene 7. (This scene is performed in silence, with the story told through movement and gesture only). At the opera the following evening Kate accompanies the Wititterlys, who

sit in one box while Mrs. Nickleby, Pluck, Pyke, Verisopht and Hawk sit in the box opposite. As the performance begins, Verisopht and Hawk visit the Wititterlys, who are all aflutter at receiving such important visitors. Kate, however, understands the real reason for their visit and pays no attention. Hawk then manipulates the situation so that he ends up alone with Kate and tries to kiss her. She runs off and the opera finishes.

Scene 8. The next day at Ralph's office, Kate asks Ralph to intervene between her and Hawk. He refuses, saying that he can't afford enemies like him in business. He suggests that it doesn't really matter, that to them it's only entertainment - and it won't last long anyway. He asks her to put up with it "just for a time." She accuses him of selling her and runs off. Outside the office, Noggs comforts her and sends her home, promising that he - and someone else - will see her soon.

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 1-8 Analysis

In this section, power and status are again the key motivating factors of the action. In the scene with Nicholas, Lenville is motivated to take action because he feels he's lost power and status, while in the sequence involving Hawk's attempted seduction of Kate, he attempts to use his status to gain power over her. These scenes contrast vividly with the few moments of honest relationship we see between Nicholas and Smike.

Ralph's brief attack of conscience before the scene at the opera foreshadows intense attack of conscience he has later in this play which leads him to killing himself.

The Wititterlys, like so many other characters who appear both earlier and later in the play, satirize the affectations and mannerisms of the upper class. Again, the trials and the pragmatism of Nicholas and Kate seem much more important when placed to their pretensions, silliness and triviality.

By the end of the Hawk episode when she confronts Ralph in his office, Kate has finally found the strength she needs to really stand up for herself. It's no wonder that Ralph says that she resembles her brother. Kate takes it as a compliment, and we're able to see in her the same courage and passion that have motivated Nicholas throughout the play so far.

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 9-10

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 9-10 Summary

Scene 9. Back in Portsmouth, the Crummles Company has gathered for a party at the home of Miss Snevellicci's parents. Mrs. Snevellicci tries to match-make Nicholas and her daughter while Mr. Snevellecci makes a thinly veiled reference in a toast to his daughter becoming "spliced." Mrs. Grudden (the company stage manager) gives Nicholas a letter that she'd forgotten to give him before. He reads it as Mr. Snevellicci proposes a toast to him, but then announces that he's got to leave both the party and the company. Crummles offers him more money and tries to convince him to stay in order to make money off of his "farewell performances," but Nicholas refuses. As Mrs. Grudden sings a sentimental song, Nicholas makes his farewells and leaves with Smike.

Scene 10. Back in London, the social climbing Mrs. Wititterly asks Kate for information about Hawk and Verisopht. Just then Hawk, Verisopht, Pluck and Pyke arrive. Mr. Wititterly comes in and comments worriedly about the strain that this visit will place on his wife's nerves. Pluck suggests that the visitors go into another room where there's no draft. Mrs. Wititterly weakly protests that she doesn't feel a draft at all, but is led away by the others, leaving Kate alone with Hawk. Kate tells Hawk how intensely she dislikes him, but Hawk tells her that it doesn't matter. Now that he's made friends with the Wititterlys, he'll be able to visit as often as he wants. Mrs. Wititterly and the others return, and Hawk suggests they leave so as to avoid tiring Mrs. Wititterly.

After they've gone, Mrs. Wititterly accuses Kate of manipulating the situation in order to be alone with Hawk and thereby advance her position at the expense of the Wititterlys. Kate protests that it's not true. Mrs. Wititterly takes that to mean that Kate thinks she's lying. Kate bursts out that she cannot believe that someone of her own sex and so much her senior can't be wise enough to see what's really going on. Mrs. Wititterly reacts with outrage (particularly at being described as "senior"), fires Kate on the spot, and collapses. As Mr. Wititterly carries out his wife, Hawk returns to collect a cane he'd forgotten. He asks Kate who will protect her now.

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 9-10 Analysis

Once again the lives of the Nickleby siblings are thrown into chaos. Positions which had started out with so much hope again come to an end. Things are slightly different for Nicholas this time, in that his position with the Crummles Company was actually enjoyable. Kate, on the other hand, faces the same situation as she faced with the Mantalinis - the victim of a misunderstanding. She also continues to be victimized by Hawk, a relationship that will impact her negatively throughout the rest of the play. Something has changed in Kate, however - from this moment in the play on she takes

no more jobs but remains devoted to her mother. This is another way of illustrating Dickens' thematically related belief in the importance of family and connection.

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 11-14

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 11-14 Summary

Scene 11. Nicholas and Smike arrive again in London, which is described by Narration as busy, crowded, and full of contrasts - life and death, wealth and poverty, all side by side. Nicholas goes immediately to see Noggs, but finds he's not home. Leaving Smike in the care of Crowl, Nicholas goes to Miss LaCreevy's, but then remembers Kate has been engaged in a position in Chelsea. As he tries to figure out how to get there ...

Scene 12. He pauses outside a coffee house just as Hawk, Verisopht, Pluck and Pyke arrive. When Nicholas overhears them talking about Kate he follows them inside and listens as they talk in less than polite terms about her. Nicholas becomes angry and demands to know Hawk's name in order to get an apology from him. Hawk refuses, Nicholas gets angry, Hawk gets nasty, Nicholas gets angrier, and the patrons of the coffee house - including Verisopht, Pluck and Pyke leave. Hawk also tries to leave, but Nicholas refuses to leave him alone. He climbs on board Hawk's coach; Hawk instructs the coachman to let the horse run, Nicholas grabs Hawk's whip and strikes him with it, the horse rears, Nicholas falls, and the carriage crashes.

Scene 13. Back at Noggs' rooms, Nicholas is having his wounds tended to by Smike and Noggs. Nicholas insists upon seeing Kate, and takes Smike to meet her. We follow him to Kate's lodgings, where Kate is pleased to meet Smike. Mrs. Nickleby and Miss LaCreevy appear with luggage. Kate and Mrs. Nickleby are in the process of moving back to Miss LaCreevy's. Smike helps them with the luggage as Kate and Nicholas have a happy reunion. Nicholas vows to write to Ralph and sever their relationship completely.

Scene 14. In Hawk's apartments, as Hawk recovers from the wounds he suffered in the carriage incident, Pluck and Pyke inform him that rumors of the encounter at the coffee house are all over London. Hawk threatens to attack Nicholas in revenge, but Verisopht nervously tells him that he was in the wrong, and that he should have respected Kate's honor. Pluck and Pyke agree, and leave Hawk on his own.

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 11-14 Analysis

The narration in this section describes the atmosphere in London in terms that have been hinted at to this point but never stated outright - as a city of vivid contrasts. In particular, we get a picture of the two worlds that Nicholas and his sister are caught between, the world of the very rich and the world of the very poor. Because this narration is placed structurally close to the scene in the coffee house, we get the sense that all Nicholas and Kate want from either of these worlds is respect and the chance to live in peace. When Nicholas vows to sever his relationship with Ralph, taking another

step towards doing just that, telling Kate will no longer have to do as Ralph asks. In other words, Nicholas is protecting her again, but this time in not so violent a fashion.

The decision by Verisopht, Pluck and Pyke to turn their backs on Hawk comes as something of a surprise, although Ralph did suggest earlier that Verisopht did respect Kate. But although we may applaud Verisopht's decision, it has devastating consequences later, as we shall see.

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 15-24

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 15-24 Summary

Scene 15. Once again Nicholas looks for work, and once again an opportunity as good as falls in his lap. He meets Mr. Charles Cheeryble as they're both looking at the situations wanted postings, they strike up a friendly conversation, and Mr. Charles asks to hear Nicholas' story as they ride the omnibus.

Scene 16. In Ralph's office, Ralph speaks to himself of his feelings for Kate, and how he feels it was, and is still, possible for her to be mistress of his home. Noggs interrupts with an urgent letter and shows in Squeers, who has come in hopes of receiving some kind of compensation from Ralph for Nicholas' behavior. When Squeers mentions Smike, Ralph becomes more interested and gets details of where Squeers is staying. Later, when Squeers is gone, Ralph realizes whom he has been talking about, and mutters that he can get back at Nicholas by going after Smike.

Scene 17. Mr. Charles and Nicholas arrive at the Cheeryble offices, where Mr. Ned Cheeryble (Mr. Charles' brother) is busy for the moment with a client. Mr. Charles introduces Nicholas to their clerk Tim just as Mr. Ned shows the client, a woman, out. Nicholas is immediately struck by the young woman's beauty, but can't pursue her because Mr. Charles is introducing him to Mr. Ned and making plans to hire Nicholas into their firm. Tim overhears, and assumes the Cheerybles are talking about Nicholas as a replacement for him. The Cheerybles assure him that there's no such plan and make arrangements for Nicholas to start the next morning. He leaves, happy about his new job but even happier about having seen the beautiful woman.

Scene 18. Nicholas speaks the words that Ralph is reading in the urgent letter, the words of renunciation that Nicholas promised Kate he would write. This makes Ralph even angrier.

Scene 19. Smike, enjoying the sights and sounds of London (enacted by the company as before) is grabbed by Squeers and taken away.

Scene 20. Kate and Mrs. Nickleby, chatting in the back garden of Miss LaCreevy's, are startled by a series of vegetables flying over the wall from the garden next door. Even though Kate calmly urges her mother to go into the house, Mrs. Nickleby calls out to whoever is throwing the vegetables to show himself. The gentleman next door looks over the wall and flirts outrageously with Mrs. Nickleby, calling her a princess. Mrs. Nickleby enjoys the flirtation, and resents it immensely when Kate very firmly calls her indoors. The gentleman's keeper comes out to fetch him, and tells the women that the gentleman is quite mad and will flirt with anyone. As the gentleman and his keeper disappear, Kate flings vegetables back over the wall while Mrs. Nickleby finally goes inside, happily disregarding the news that her new suitor is out of his mind. Nicholas comes back, anxious about Smike, who has disappeared.

Scene 21. Outside the pub where Nicholas first met Squeers, Tilda and John arrive for their honeymoon, accompanied by a tired and grumpy Fanny. They're met by Squeers, who takes great pleasure in telling them that he's captured Smike. As John congratulates him, Fanny asks where Smike actually is. Squeers reveals he's back at his town lodgings and invites everyone there for tea. John accepts with somewhat surprising speed, saying their honeymoon can wait. Squeers leaves, John follows, and Tilda and Fanny bring up the rear, expressing concern that John has lost his wits.

Scene 22 As Ralph runs home in the rain, he's met by a beggar man named Brooker, who attempts to blackmail him. Ralph dismisses him and runs on. Brooker promises that Ralph will hear from him again.

Scene 23. At Squeers' lodgings, Smike is locked up when John sneaks in, releases him, tells him to go back to Nicholas, and convey the news that John and Tilda are now married. When Smike is gone, John laughs.

Scene 24. As Smike travels the country roads to get back to London, we see what's going through his mind - a nightmarish remembering of life at Dotheboys. As the nightmare fades, Smike enters London (as portrayed by the company as before) and is discovered by Noggs, who takes him home to Nicholas and Kate.

Part 2, Act 1, Scenes 15-24 Analysis

Once again apparent coincidence plays a key role in Nicholas' adventures - his encounter with Charles Cheeryble and, indirectly, Squeers' encounter with Smike. Once again Ralph finds himself torn between attraction to Kate and resentment of her brother. Once again compassion wins out as a very quick thinking John frees Smike. These repeated patterns of action and emotion suggest that another aspect of the play's theme is persistence - one way that compassion and connection can triumph over greed is to keep living it as a value.

Two important pieces of foreshadowing appear in this section - Brooker's attempt at blackmail and Nicholas' glimpse of the beautiful woman. The first plays a role in Ralph's eventual downfall, while the second sets in motion a series of events that leads to the happiest of happy endings.

Smike's nightmare is another example of how theatrical conventions like narration (the descriptions of London and the characters' description of their own actions and feelings) and having two realities onstage at once (seeing both Smike on the road and the terrors in his mind) create a more immediate and powerful impact than words on a page or visual images alone can do in other forms of storytelling art.

Part 2, Act 2, Scenes 1-4

Part 2, Act 2, Scenes 1-4 Summary

Scene 1. At the tavern, Nicholas meets with John and Tilda with three purposes in mind. He wants to thank John for rescuing Smike, to congratulate John and Tilda on getting married - but before he can get to the third purpose, their conversation is interrupted by an altercation spilling in from the street. A young man is attacking an angry man for being disrespectful to a young woman, whom the young man didn't even know. As Nicholas (for obvious reasons) seems to side with him, the young man calms down and suggests that both he and the angry man calm down and reconsider their situation tomorrow. The angry man leaves, and Nicholas and the young man exchange cards, which is when Nicholas discovers that the young man is another Cheeryble - Frank Cheeryble, to be exact, who has heard of Nicholas and was coming to down to meet him. Nicholas now has a chance to get to his third purpose, to invite John and Tilda to dinner. He asks Frank to join the party as well.

Scene 2. Narration tells us that after dinner with John and Tilda, Nicholas paid a call on the Kenwigs,' who have had another baby which Mr. Kenwigs has called Lillyvick. Nicholas tells them that Lillyvick is married, and when he sees how hysterically the Kenwigs take the news, leaves very quickly.

Scene 3. Nicholas pays his final call of the evening - to Newman Noggs. Nicholas thanks Noggs for finding Smike, and then confesses that he is in love with the woman he saw at the Cheerybles.

Scene 4. The next day, we see both Ralph's office and the Cheerybles' office.

In Ralph's office, Noggs becomes tired of waiting for Ralph to return from a lunch meeting and takes a nip or two from a flask of liquor. In the Cheerybles' office, Mr. Charles and Mr. Ned have a quick word with Nicholas.

In Ralph's office, Noggs is forced to hide when Ralph comes in with an elderly man named Gride. He overhears Gride make a deal with Ralph that will help him (Gride) manipulate into marriage the beautiful young daughter of a man named Bray who owes Gride a lot of money. Gride reveals that he has a deed of property to which the young woman - and therefore her husband would be entitled. Ralph claims a portion of the money included in the deed as payment of the debts owed to him by Bray.

Meanwhile, in the Cheerybles' office, Mr. Charles and Mr. Ned send Nicholas on an errand to that same young woman - who just happens to be the woman with whom Nicholas had fallen in love. Madeline.

Part 2, Act 2, Scenes 1-4 Analysis

The confrontation in the pub mirrors the confrontation Nicholas had with Hawk over Kate's honor, and again reinforces the theme of compassion (that the young man feels for a woman he doesn't know) vs. disrespect (displayed by the angry man towards the woman).

The scene with the Kenwigs is exactly the reaction foreseen by Lillyvick earlier in the play, and illustrates the foolishness of depending too much upon money.

The story's final significant sub-plot is set in motion in this section. The complications of the Gride-Bray-Madeline storyline form the basis for the climactic dramatic and romantic complications to follow.

The convention of having two realities onstage at the same time is again effective in this scene, as we understand through the action rather than being told by narration that Gride and Ralph are plotting to ensnare the same woman with whom Nicholas is in love. Thus the stage is set for the final confrontation between Nicholas (who throughout the play has represented virtue, integrity and compassion) and Ralph (who throughout the play has represented greed, ruthlessness and cunning).

Part 2, Act 2, Scenes 5-7

Part 2, Act 2, Scenes 5-7 Summary

Scene 5. Nicholas travels through the poorest and most degraded section of London (as illustrated by the members of the company who appear as beggars and madmen) to complete his errand for the Cheerybles, paying the deposit on a commission for some household artwork from Madeline. Bray, touchy and in a wheelchair, insists on conducting the transaction as proper business with receipts and all the accompanying paperwork. Nicholas asks when he should return with another payment, and Madeline tells him, a week, in spite of Bray saying three weeks. Madeline wheels her father off, then hurries back to plead with Nicholas to not tell the Cheerybles how difficult her father was. Nicholas impulsively tells her how he feels about her, but Madeline tells him to say nothing more and leaves. Nicholas wonders aloud how he can wait a whole week to see her again.

Scene 6. Ralph and Gride manipulate Bray into agreeing to the marriage of Madeline and Gride. Madeline comes in to wheel her father back home. Gride tries to kiss her hand in farewell, but she backs away from him. After they're all gone Noggs comes in and tells Ralph that Squeers has arrived. Ralph orders Noggs to get a coach to take them to the Strand, which Noggs realizes will take Ralph to the home of Nickleby and Kate. As Noggs hails a coach, Brooker approaches him and asks to have a conversation after Ralph has left.

Scene 7. The Nickleby's party (Nicholas, Kate, Mrs. Nickleby, Smike, Miss LaCreevy, John and Tilda, Frank Cheeryble and Tim) gather happily. They're interrupted by the arrival of Ralph and Squeers, who bring with them Mr. Snawley (the man from the first half with the two sons he sent to Dotheboys). Snawley brings with him papers that he says prove he is Smike's father. Frank examines the papers and reluctantly agrees they're real. As Snawley and Squeers try to lead Smike away, he proclaims his desire to stay. John's temper explodes, and he pushes Snawley and Squeers out the door. Ralph threatens John and Nicholas with the law, then leaves. Miss LaCreevy bundles the still upset Smike off to bed just as the crazy gentleman from next door interrupts and presents Mrs. Nickleby with a cucumber - which, when Miss LaCreevy returns, he takes from Mrs. Nickleby and gives it to Miss LaCreevy. Mrs. Nickleby faints, Nicholas and the other men take the Gentleman back to his keeper, and Smike watches as Tim comforts Miss LaCreevy and Frank Cheeryble comforts Kate.

Part 2, Act 2, Scenes 5-7 Analysis

This section, which begins with the Company portraying the poorest, nastiest, most desperate sections of London, shows us what the people who live in those sections of London can and will do in order to escape;Gride, Bray, Squeers and Snawley all act out of greed and a desire for vengeance, while even the gentleman from next door is an

example of the kind of desperation that people in such dire circumstances can resort to. Even Ralph, although though he has money already, still behaves with the same kind of ruthless grasping as the poorest, most desperate people. This suggests to us that even though he's rich, he's poor in spirit.

The closing tableau, with Smike watching the two couples, foreshadows the two secondary romances that come into existence in the story's closing scenes (Kate/Frank and Tim/Miss LaCreevy), and also indicates Smike's growing love for Kate.

Part 2, Act 2, Scenes 8-16

Part 2, Act 2, Scenes 8-16 Summary

Scene 8. Gride pulls out an old suit and gets ready for his wedding to Madeline. He calls for his housekeeper Peg and tells her to mend the suit. Noggs arrives with a letter from Ralph which Gride reads. He sends back a one word answer - yes. Gride then asks Noggs to stay for a drink and proposes a toast to Madeline, his young bride to be. Noggs realizes that this is the same Madeline with whom Nicholas is in love and hurries off, presumably to warn Nicholas. Once he's gone, Gride takes out the deed he mentioned to Ralph, looks it over once more, puts it back in the trunk and leaves - unaware that Peg has been watching him. She mutters to herself that she's not going to let some little chit of a girl take her place with Gride.

Scene 9. Noggs tells Nicholas what he knows about Madeline's impending wedding, and Nicholas vows to stop it whatever the cost.

Scene 10. Nicholas visits Madeline and Bray with another commission, but Bray tells him that there will be no more commissions and they have no more need of any money. Nicholas expresses his concerns that Madeline and Bray are being taken advantage of, but Bray loses his temper and demands to be taken out of Nicholas' sight. Madeline takes him out and then returns to urge Nicholas to not visit her anymore. Nicholas pleads with her to not go through with the marriage, but she insists that she will go through with it for the sake of her happiness, and her father's. Nicholas suggests that he knows of a way to get Madeline even more of a fortune than the marriage can offer. Madeline disbelieves him, tells him to not come again, and asks him to tell the Cheerybles that she was happy.

Scene 11. Verisopht, Pluck, Pyke and a host of others are at a gambling house when Hawk arrives, limping but pleased with himself. When he's asked why he never denied the rumors in the papers after the confrontation with Nicholas, Hawk merely suggests that people look at the papers tomorrow. Verisopht assumes that Hawk means something is going to happen to Nicholas, and urges him to not go through with whatever his plans are. Hawk refuses, Verisopht insists, Hawk continues to refuse, tempers flare, and Verisopht slaps Hawk across the face. Hawk challenges Verisopht to a duel, which Verisopht accepts in spite of being told that Hawk is an excellent shot. As Hawk and Verisopht leave, the gamblers place bets on who will win the duel.

Scene 12. Shortly afterwards, early in the morning, Verisopht and Hawk meet for the duel. Verisopht tells Hawk that he owes Ralph Nickleby ten thousand pounds and that if he dies the debts remain, only this time owed by Ralph. This means, Verisopht suggests, that that Ralph and Hawk will both be ruined. Hawk and Verisopht duel, Verisopht is killed, and Hawk hurriedly prepares to leave the country. Pluck and Pyke, who have seen the whole thing, steal Verisopht's valuables from his corpse and haul the body off.

Scene 13. That same morning, Nicholas narrates how he went into London, unsure about how to rescue Madeline. Soon he's surrounded by members of the Company, again portraying the poor and destitute of the city. Nicholas sees them as representing the hopelessness of struggling with the powers of money and status, and feels hopeless himself. As the Company disappears, Noggs comes to Nicholas and reminds him that there's always hope.

Scene 14. Ralph, Madeline, Bray and a Minister wait in Ralph's offices. Gride arrives and the wedding ceremony quickly begins. Nicholas and Kate burst in, demanding to speak with Madeline. Gride and Ralph resist and it looks for a moment as though Nicholas is going to lose his temper again. Bray suddenly seems very ill, and Madeline pulls him aside. Just then Hawk arrives, with the news of Verisopht's death and of Verisopht's debts being passed on to Ralph. Madeline announces that Bray is dead. Hawk leaves, and Madeline reveals that just as he died, Bray apologized to her for luring her into the marriage with Gride. Kate takes Madeline out of the room, and Nicholas follows with Bray. Gride and Ralph blame each other for what just happened, and Ralph asks Gride to leave. As he's going, Gride discovers that Madeline's deed is missing, and realizes that Peg has taken it. This makes Ralph realize there's a possibility of getting at least something out of the deal, and he offers to help Gride find the deed.

Scene 15. At the Nickleby home, Smike tends the garden while Kate and Nicholas attempt to explain what happened to Mrs. Nickleby. They're interrupted by the Cheerybles - Charles, Ned and Frank - who have come to find out what happened to Madeline. Kate finds out that Madeline is willing to see the Cheerybles and ushers them inside. Nicholas goes to get Smike, and discovers that he seems quite ill.

Scene 16. As Smike is preparing to go away for a rest, Brooker (the man who'd been attempting to blackmail Ralph) comes up to him and they recognize each other. Before we can learn any more Kate and Nicholas appear, ready to take Smike to their old home in Devon for a rest cure. Mrs. Nickleby and Miss LaCreevy wave farewell.

Part 2, Act 2, Scenes 8-16 Analysis

Most notable in this section is the parallel development of the Verisopht plot and the Madeline plot. Both Verisopht and Madeline find themselves in the same position - facing death at the hands of someone with higher status who has exploited them for money. Verisopht's death is literal while Madeline's is spiritual. The difference between the two plots is that Verisopht has no-one of compassion and integrity to save him from his fate, and thus he dies - but not without having an effect on the lives of Hawk and Ralph, whose financial manipulations have in many ways ruined his life. Madeline, however, has Nicholas to aid her, and his timely intervention saves her from her apparently awful fate.

Also worth noting is the appearance of the Company as the lowest of the low in London. Once again this represents the moral and financial destitution that Nicholas and his

family are struggling to avoid as well as the desperation that Ralph continually exploits for his own gain. By the appearance of the Company in this form, we're reminded again of the need for compassion in this world, but in this instance - the company seeming to overwhelm Nicholas - how it takes strength and perseverance to continue to hope in the face of such overwhelming despair.

Part 2, Act 3, Scenes 1-3

Part 2, Act 3, Scenes 1-3 Summary

Scene 1. In the Kenwigs' home, as baby Lillyvick is screaming, Mr. Lillyvick arrives with some news. Nobody in the family welcomes him, until he confesses that his wife, the former Miss Petowker, has taken off and left him. The Kenwigs quickly welcome him back into the family, and just as quickly go back to treating him with the same greed-inspired respect as before.

Scene 2. At Ralph's home, Ralph muses on the ten thousand pound debt. Squeers arrives in response to a letter from Ralph, but before we learn what the note was about we discover that Squeers is nervous about Snawley. Ralph reassures Squeers that there's no danger to any of them - all the papers were genuine, all the facts were true, the only lie (that Smike was Snawley's son) was Snawley's. Ralph also reminds Squeers that they both still want to take revenge on Nicholas, and tells him there's a way to do it. Find the person who took the deed, take the deed from her, and destroy it. Ralph offers a hundred pounds for a fee, and then he and Squeers go off - followed by Noggs, who heard everything.

Scene 3. In the country, Nicholas and Kate show Smike their old home, their old garden, a tree where their father found Kate once when she was a lost little girl, and the churchyard where their father is buried. As Kate wanders, deep in memory, Smike asks Nicholas to be buried as close as possible to the tree. Nicholas agrees.

Narration tells us that within two weeks Smike became too ill to move, but rested most of the time on a bench. Nicholas and Kate leave him for a moment, discuss the people they left behind in London - particularly Madeline and Frank, and congratulate each other for being courageous in refusing to marry their loved ones out of not wanting to seen taking advantage of their wealth. They tell each other that they will be each other's companions, and vow to move on without regret.

They're interrupted by Smike, who shouts out lines from *Romeo and Juliet*. Nicholas responds with his lines from their scene together. As he looks at Kate, Smike quotes lines speaking of Juliet's beauty, whispers in Nicholas' ear, and dies. Nicholas and Kate both weep.

Part 2, Act 3, Scenes 1-3 Analysis

The scene with the Kenwigs and the scene between Ralph and Squeers make a parallel statement in the way the Verisopht and Madeline plots paralleled each other in the previous section. In this case, both scenes illustrate again the lengths to which people will go to gain money and/or status. The Kenwigs scene is more comic in the sudden change in attitude the Kenwigs display when they hear of Mr. Lillyvick's change in

status, but their greed for his money is no different, in essence, from the greed of Ralph and Squeers for revenge on Nicholas.

The death of Smike is the emotional and thematic climax of the play. We have grown to care for and empathize with Smike in the same way that Nicholas and his family have, which means that we feel his loss in the same way as Nicholas and Kate. More importantly, we've seen how being treated with respect and compassion by Nicholas and his family has brought Smike to a place where he can die happy, which is the most vivid statement to this point of the play's theme relating to the value of compassion.

Part 2, Act 3, Scenes 4-8

Part 2, Act 3, Scenes 4-8 Summary

Scene 4. In his attic room, Squeers considers to himself the manipulations of Ralph Nickleby that brought him there - the money offered to get the deed, the way Ralph found out where Peg lives, and got him a place next door. He then reads a letter from home reporting on the status of the school, drinks a toast to his family, then takes the liquor over to Peg, who's revealed to live next door. Squeers seduces her into handing over the deed, but just as he's about to leave Noggs, Frank Cheeryble and two police officers arrive with a warrant for Squeers' and Peg's arrest. After a chase, Peg, Squeers and the deed are all taken into custody. Frank hurries off to convey the good news to Nicholas and Kate.

Scene 5. Alone in his dining room, Ralph contemplates a mysterious feeling that's causing him to lose sleep. He's interrupted by a messenger with a letter. The contents of the letter send Ralph running through the streets of London. First he goes to Snawley, whose wife refuses to admit him, then to Gride, who won't see him, then to Peg's, where a prostitute tells him that Squeers and Peg have been taken away by the police.

Scene 6. At the police station, Ralph confronts Squeers, who says that if the police ask him what happened he'll explain that everything was Ralph's idea. Ralph refuses to give up, going to pay a call on ...

Scene 7.The Cheerybles, we learn that it was they who sent Ralph the letter he received in Scene 5. Ralph demands to know why the Cheerybles wanted to see him. The Cheerybles confront Ralph with Newman Noggs, who has finally had enough of Ralph's evildoings and is confessing everything, including the plot involving Madeline's deed. Ralph laughs Noggs off, saying that the Cheerybles have no proof of anything. The Cheerybles then mention that Snawley has confessed and that Smike has died. Neither piece of information has any effect on Ralph. Finally Noggs brings out Brooker, who confronts Ralph with the information that Smike was in fact his son (Ralph's) and not Snawley's at all.

Brooker tells the story of how Ralph married his daughter, got her pregnant, and abandoned both her and the boy to pursue his career in London, how the girl ran away and how Ralph ordered Brooker to keep the boy from his mother, how the boy was treated badly, and how he (Brooker) told Ralph that the boy had died but in fact was placed at Dotheboys Hall and given the name Smike.

Scene 8. Ralph leaves the Cheerybles and makes his way once more through the streets of London, feeling even more the effects of the mysterious feeling that's been bothering him. He contemplates how his life might have been different if he'd treated Smike better, but realizes that thinking of such things gains him nothing. He gets a rope, goes into the room where Smike slept as a baby, climbs upon a chair ...

After a blackout, the Cheerybles narrate how Ralph hung himself and was found the next morning.

Part 2, Act 3, Scenes 4-8 Analysis

This section contains the dramatic climax of the play, which is also a secondary thematic climax. The mysterious feeling troubling Ralph is never actually identified, but it's easy for us to perceive it as his conscience, torturing him for what he's done not just to Nicholas and Kate, but also as we find out, to Smike. As all of the people who allied themselves to Ralph desert or betray him, it suggests that just as compassion like Nicholas' will be rewarded so will greed like Ralph's. Ralph's reward, however, is much less life affirming than Nicholas,' which completes the story's thematic statement that it's better to give than to grasp.

Once again the Company is put to effective, theatrical use. As Ralph journeys through the streets of London, increasingly desperate, the Chorus portrays his conscience and despair, grasping at him from the darkness. They also portray a pauper's graveyard, which Ralph perceives as full of the grasping arms of the deceased poor but which might actually represent the people whom Ralph's greed has destroyed, and finally a group of drunken revelers, who seem to be dancing in the face of death which might be perceived as the happy dance of the poor people freed from the exploitation of Ralph and people like him.

With Ralph's death, the dramatic high point of the action, the way is cleared for the happy endings to come.

Part 2, Act 3, Scenes 9-12

Part 2, Act 3, Scenes 9-12 Summary

Scene 9. Miss LaCreevy, Mrs. Nickleby, Tim Linkinwater and the Cheeryble brothers greet Kate and Nicholas upon their return from Devon. Miss LaCreevy, Mrs. Nickleby, Tim and Ned Cheeryble discreetly withdraw as Charles Cheeryble confronts Nicholas and Kate about their rejection of Frank and Madeline, watching from a hiding place.

Mr. Charles tells Nicholas and Kate that he's hurt that they thought, even for a moment, that the Cheerybles are such poor judges of character that they would assume Nicholas and Kate are after Frank and Madeline's money. He also chides them for suggesting that they themselves would become corrupted if they came in contact with riches. Nicholas protests that that's what they've learned on their various journeys - that to become connected with money is to become corrupted. At this point Frank and Madeline can keep silent no longer and convince Kate and Nicholas that their fears are unfounded.

Just as everybody returns to go in to dinner, Noggs arrives in a new suit, confessing that he's been helping the police. He joins the dinner, which Narration tells us was very happy for everyone except for a small worry that kept troubling Nicholas. Narration also tells us that the following day Nicholas and Kate left for Dotheboys in Yorkshire ...

Scene 10. While passing a theatre on the way which is playing host to the Crummles Acting Company, Nicholas goes in for a visit, introduces Kate, and discovers that the company is about to set off on a tour of America. When Mrs. Crummles asks whether Nicholas will be able to stay for their final performance, Nicholas says that he regrets he'll be unable to. Mrs. Crummles tells him "That's all I remember of you ... all the time, regretting ... and if not regretting, then farewelling ..." Nicholas and the company make their farewells, leaving Nicholas and Kate to continue their journey to Dotheboys.

Scene 11. We see the boys chasing Squeers' son Wackford, and making him tell them what's happened to Squeers. Before they can taunt him any further, Mrs. Squeers and Fanny come on with a boy who resembles Smike. As they prepare to dose the boys with the medicine she dosed the other boys with earlier, the boys push her down and feed her the medicine. Soon their rebellion becomes violent and they begin to riot.

Nicholas, accompanied by John and Tilda Bowdie, rush in and break up the riot. Nicholas urges the boys to all run away, and they happily do. Fanny vows revenge for letting the boys go, but Tilda and John convince her to accept their friendship instead. As everybody leaves, the "New Smike" is left alone ...

Scene 12 ... quietly singing what he remembers of the Christmas Carol "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" as the Company appears and forms a happy tableau of Christmas behind him.

Narration tells us, as the Company joins in the singing of the carol, that Nicholas became a partner in business with Charles and Ned Cheeryble, who eventually retired, that Nicholas and Madeline married and raised a family on the family farm bought back by Nicholas, that Kate and Frank married and raised a family on a farm nearby, and that everybody lived happily together, friends and family alike.

As the Company sings the Carol and portrays the celebration of a joyous Christmas, Nicholas becomes aware of "The New Smike" who is still alone. He goes to him ... touches him ... the boy doesn't respond. Nicholas almost goes back to the party but can't leave the boy. He picks him up in his arms and joins in with the rest of the Company on the last few lines of the Carol. "Oh tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy - oh tidings of comfort and joy."

Part 2, Act 3, Scenes 9-12 Analysis

The riot at Dotheboys again reminds us of what could happen when the long-suppressed spirit of self-respect and independence in every human being is released, while Nicholas' compassion for the boys and John Bowdie's wise words to Fanny remind us that even in the face of such violent emotions, compassion can still be transcendent.

One line in Scene 10 sums up an important thematic and emotional component to this play. Mrs. Crummles refers to Nicholas as always regretting and always farewelling. This suggests that in the past Nicholas has lived in despair - not the deepest despair we've seen in the citizens of London in previous narrations, but despair nonetheless. At this point in the play we, and Nicholas, realize that he's come to a turning point in his life, that there is no reason for him to live that way any longer.

This final thematic point, along with the final tableau, relates to the change in Nicholas' spiritual and financial circumstances. His final moments of embracing someone similar to Smike remind him, and us, that even though we may be happy and may have accomplished our goals there are still those out there who need our compassion. The unspoken warning is of danger that we could become more like Ralph, greedy and self-centered; if we forget that there are people less fortunate. This, in turn, means that the juxtaposition of this final image of Nicholas' compassion with the words "comfort and joy" suggests that it's both the needy and the advantaged that derive comfort and joy from acts of compassion.

Finally, the theme and story of *Nicholas Nickleby* remind those of us who live in today's society, in which the gap between the very very rich and the very very poor is even wider than ever, that compassion for the disadvantaged is necessary, life affirming and rewarding, while excessive greed is destructive, dangerous, and soul eroding.

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Characters

Madeline Bray

Madeline Bray, the beautiful, proud, and intelligent daughter of Walter Bray, nearly submits to her father's request to marry the much older, lecherous Arthur Gride so that her ailing father might have the peace of mind of knowing his daughter will have a home after he dies. She had sought the help of the Cheeryble brothers and does not know it is they who have sent Nicholas Nickleby to her to make the small purchases that are keeping her finances afloat. Madeline keeps her attraction to Nicholas Nickleby to herself, hoping that by accepting the arranged marriage to Gride, she can ensure that her father dies happy. He dies before the wedding's conclusion, which is interrupted by Nicholas, whom she eventually marries. In the meantime, she inherits twelve thousand pounds upon her marriage.

Walter Bray

At the end of a dissolute life and hopelessly in debt to Ralph Nickleby, Walter arranges to marry his daughter off to a lecherous old miser, Arthur Gride, in a deal orchestrated by Ralph. Tyrannical and miserable, Walter, at the last moment of his life, regrets his betrayal of his only daughter and closes his eyes so that he will not see the wedding, which does not take place, due to Nicholas Nickleby's interference.

John Browdie

John is a simple Yorkshireman with a thick brogue, whom Nicholas meets during his brief stay at Dotheboys Hall. John assists Nicholas's escape, after the latter strikes Mr. Squeers for his mistreatment of the boys at Dotheboys. John marries Tilda Price, and they travel together to London on their honeymoon, where John once again helps Nicholas, this time to free Smike from Mr. Squeers.

Charles Cheeryble

A philanthropist whose "kindheartedness" and "good-humour" "light up his jolly old face," Charles and his brother act as benefactors to Madeline Bray, and they leave their business to Nicholas after They retire, just in time to set him up financially for his marriage to Madeline. Of the two brothers, Charles is more confident and outgoing; he does the planning of their benevolent enterprises.

Ninetta Crummles

See Infant Phenomenon

Mr. Vincent Crummles

The father and manager of the theatrical Crummles family and parent of The Infant Phenomenon, Vincent hires Nicholas to play the part of Romeo in a much-revised version of that play, in which the two lovers miraculously survive their suicide attempts. He also pays Nicholas to produce other lighthearted theatrical fare.

Arthur Gride

A lecherous old miser, about seventy-five years old, who works out a deal with Ralph Nickleby in return for an arranged marriage to Madeline Bray, many years his junior. The basis of his scheme is his illicitly gained knowledge that Madeline will inherit a small fortune upon her marriage. His deaf maid, Peg Sliderskew, steals a document that proves his guilt, in retribution for his intention to marry and leave her (Peg) without a means of living.

Mrs. Grudden

A kindly old soul, Mrs. Grudden is the piano player and extra player with the Crummles theatrical troupe.

Sir Mulberry Hawk

An aristocratic young man, he spends his time gambling and drinking with Lord Verisopht. They meet Kate Nickleby at the home of Mrs. Witterly, where Kate serves as the lady's companion. Hawk tries to seduce Kate, and when she rebuffs him, he tries to take her by force. When Nicholas hears Hawk making rude remarks about Kate and then refusing to identify himself, he beats Hawk nearly senseless with a horsewhip. Hawk swears vengeance. Hawk is thoroughly bad; he and Verisopht have been taking advantage of other gamblers, but their alliance does not prevent Hawk from trying to cheat Verisopht as well. He shoots Verisopht in a duel and escapes to France.

The Infant Phenomenon

This is the stage name of Ninetta Crummles, a child of about fifteen who has been playing the part of a ten-year-old for five years. She is the hope and pride of the theatrical Crummles family.

Edwin Cheeryble

Brother to Charles, Ned participates in their secret dealings to raise people out of poverty and misery and to spread good will. Ned is eager and agreeable, and he willingly implements the generous plans Charles devises.

Frank Cheeryble

The nephew to the Cheeryble brothers, Frank comes to London from Wales, just in time to fall in love with and marry Kate Nickleby. Frank is as good-natured and kindhearted as his generous uncles.

Mrs. Crummles

The boisterous and good-natured wife of Vincent Crummles, Mrs. Crummles welcomes Nicholas to the world of the itinerant theatrical troupe. She embraces the world of illusions of the stage and of life.

Morleena Kenwigs

Morleena fawns over her uncle Lillyvick, hoping to encourage his willingness to act as her family's benefactor. She screams in horror when she learns that he has married and then fawns over him again when he announces that his marriage has failed.

Mr. Kenwigs

Mr. Kenwigs is the head of the family downstairs from Newman Noggs. His is a generous family who frequently invites the bachelor to dine with them. He has a rather large family—his seventh child, Lillyvick, is born during the play—but he hopes for a marriage between his wife's rich uncle, Mr. Lillyvick, and his daughter Morleena to cement their livelihood. When Kenwigs learns that the uncle has eloped with an actress, he despairs and expresses his distaste for the older man, but all is repaired when the uncle announces that his marriage has fallen apart because the actress eloped again with an actor.

Mrs. Susan Kenwigs

Mrs. Kenwigs is a hearty woman from a "genteel family," who takes things in stride better than her husband does.

Miss Knag

Miss Knag presides over the milliner's shop belonging to Madame Mantalini. At first, she shows Kate Nicholas the ropes when the latter comes to work for them. But when it becomes apparent that Kate's youth and beauty make her a more attractive storekeeper, she hates her rival. When Mr. Mantalini's spendthrift ways cause the business to go bankrupt, Miss Knag buys it from Ralph Nickleby.

Miss La Creevy

Miss La Creevy is a self-proclaimed artist, a painter of miniatures, with whom Kate and Mrs. Nickleby take lodgings when they arrive in London. Her optimism helps them overcome their fears, but Ralph Nickleby quickly forces the pair to move to more humble lodgings.

Mr. Lillyvick

Uncle to Susan Kenwigs, Mr. Lillyvick has saved up a small fortune as a "collector of water rates." He falls in love with the actress Miss Petowker, follows her to Portsmouth, and marries her. However, she runs off with another actor, and he returns to London, to the great relief of the Kenwigs family, who hopes to inherit his money when he dies.

Mr. Alfred Mantalini

Mr. Mantalini is an oily profligate and womanizer, who embezzles money from his wife's milliner's shop to support his spendthrift lifestyle. His catchphrase "demned" and its various interpretations reveals his attempt at sounding like an aristocrat. He calls himself the "demdest villain ever lived" when his wife discovers he has taken several unpaid bills to Ralph Nickleby to cash in.

Madam Mantalini

The owner of a fashionable milliner's shop in London, Mrs. Mantalini fails to see through her husband's fawning flattery, even when she catches him stealing money from her store. After he has driven her to bankruptcy with his wasteful spending, she surprises him by throwing him out and announcing that she has had the foresight to sell the business to Miss Knag and will serve as manager of the shop instead of owner.

Ned

See See Edwin Cheeyble

Kate Nickleby

Nicholas's sweet and demure seventeen-year-old sister innocently takes on one menial job after another, in hopes of earning enough to keep herself and her mother out of the poorhouse and away from the clutches of her avaricious uncle, Ralph Nickleby. Kate first works in Mrs. Mantalini's millinery and then serves as hostess at a dinner party for her uncle, where Sir Mulberry Hawk makes unwelcome advances. Kate inspires love from the socially damaged Smike, but he never reveals his feelings to her. She never loses faith that her brother eventually will save her from destitution. She and Nicholas

vow never to marry for money, but when Frank Cheeryble insists that he loves her, she demurs happily.

Mrs. Nickleby

Mrs. Nickleby is based loosely on Charles Dickens's own mother. She is a garrulous woman whose talk meanders in a desultory manner, and she clings to an illusory gentility, despite her bleak surroundings, for she has never had a knack for recognizing reality. When an insane neighbor tosses vegetables into her garden as a form of courtship, she takes his advances seriously and never realizes his limitations. Her disconnection with reality makes it possible for her to sail through her family's misery with no ill effect on herself.

Nicholas Nickleby

The spirited hero of the story, Nicholas fights villainy and corruption with a ferocity that seems out of character with the mild-mannered hero often found in Victorian novels. Dickens defended his characterization of Nicholas as a natural, not an idealized, young man, saying in the Preface to his 1848 edition, "If Nicholas be not always found to be blameless or agreeable, he is not always intended to appear so. He is a young man of an impetuous temper and of little or no experience; and I saw no reason why such a hero should be lifted out of nature."

He accepts a position as tutor at Dotheboys Hall, even though it requires separating from his mother and sister, so that he can begin to earn his way in the world. At first he ignores the mistreatment of the young, deformed, and unwanted charges, but eventually he rebels and strikes Mr. Squeers, the schoolmaster, and leaves, taking young Smike, a mentally retarded child, with him. Nicholas then begins his adventure in earnest, taking a position in the theatre as an actor and playwright and returning to London when he hears that his sister needs him to defend her honor against Sir Mulberry Hawk.

The benevolent Cheeryble brothers take him in, and with their guidance he is able to save his mother and sister, as well as Smike, and to discredit his uncle Ralph and his cohorts. After falling in love with Madeline Bray, who has sought the financial help of the Cheerybles, he frets over how to win her and only succeeds in doing so after Newman Noggs, Ralph's disgruntled assistant, encourages him and gives him information about her upcoming marriage to Gride. Nicholas often seems unable to act decisively without the guidance of older, wiser characters such as Noggs, the Cheerybles, and John Browdie. Eventually, he marries Madeline and plans to raise a big family in the country near his old family home.

Ralph Nickleby

Ralph Nickleby is a conniving and avaricious Scrooge type of character. He does not welcome his sister-in-law, niece, and nephew when they come to him for aid after his

brother dies. To get Nicholas out of the way, he sends him to Dotheboys Hall, to work for his erstwhile partner in crime, Mr. Squeers. Rather than truly help his relatives to find their way in the city, a setting in which they feel unsure and out of place, Ralph only pushes them into situations that are dangerous for them and potentially profitable for him. Thus, he parades his niece to a profligate aristocrat, Sir Mulberry Hawk, simply to cement a business relationship. However, he does not account for the spirit that Nicholas shows in saving Smike and rescuing both Kate and Madeline. Through Nicholas's efforts, Smike is revealed to be Ralph's son from a distant love relationship that withered long ago in Ralph's past. When Ralph learns of this, he hangs himself in remorse, thus demonstrating that he had a heart after all.

Newman Noggs

Noggs is Ralph's clerk, a middle-aged man with the face and habits of an alcoholic. Noggs was from a good family, but through a dissolute lifestyle, he had lost his money when Ralph took him in. Watching Nickleby's criminal schemes has driven him to continued drinking, and he wrings his hands constantly in frustration. On one occasion he punches an imaginary Ralph Nickleby in the air to vent his anger. Noggs hides in a closet and overhears Ralph and Gride plotting to trade Madeline for releasing Mr. Bray's debts. Even through his drunken state, Noggs is horrified, and this latest act of villainy on Ralph Nickleby's part pushes him to action. Noggs becomes a kind of father to Nicholas as he girds the young man to overturn the plan and marry Madeline himself.

Miss Petowker

Miss Petowker is an itinerant actress who entices Mr. Lillyvick to marry her and then runs off with another man.

Tilda Price

Tilda (short for Matilda) Price is a friend of Fanny Squeers. Tilda tries to push Nicholas and Fanny together, but Nicholas takes no interest in her. Tilda marries John Browdie, and Fanny accompanies them on their wedding trip to London.

Peg Sliderskew

The ugly, deaf maidservant of Arthur Gride, Peg steals the documents about Madeline's inheritance so that Gride will not marry Madeline and thus leave Peg out in the cold. She gets caught, but the satisfaction of having spoiled Gride's plans compensates for her misery.

Smike

Smike is the son of Ralph Nickleby from an early marriage whom he has all but forgotten. Ralph had put the child into the care of Brooker, who dropped the boy off at Dotheboys Hall. Ironically, then, Ralph contributes to the mistreatment of his own child, through his dealings with the schoolmaster, Mr. Squeers. Smike is badly fed, badly treated, and badly clothed, and years of neglect and abuse have stunted his mental and physical health. Nicholas takes Smike away from Dotheboys Hall and cares for him until Squeers recaptures the boy, simply to cause harm to Nicholas. John Browdie helps Nicholas get Smike back. Smike silently worships Kate, and he dies of pining for her. Kate and Nicholas attend him in his last moments and bury him under a tree in their old homestead.

Mr. Snawley

Snawley is an associate of Ralph Nickleby who poses as Smike's father but confesses.

Fanny Squeers

The daughter of Mr. Squeers, Fanny has hopes of wooing Nicholas Nickleby, but these are quickly squelched, and she spends the rest of the play hating him.

Mrs. Squeers

Mrs. Squeers collaborates with her husband to keep the Dotheboys Hall schoolboys too weak to complain about their care or education. She administers a weekly dose of "brimstone" to dull their appetites. She riffles through the children's mail, removing anything of value, and she skimps on Nicholas's portions of food, as she does the children's. Despite their sordid surroundings, she laughs and flirts gaily with her "Squeery dearie."

Mr. Wackford Squeers

A oneeyed, ugly ogre, Mr. Squeers is the hateful master of Dotheboys Hall. Dickens based him on an actual schoolmaster who had been sued for his mistreatment of school children. He cares more about the wellbeing of his cows and pigs than that of the children, whose fevers and illnesses he punishes as acts of insubordination. Squeers dishes out stingy and inadequate meals and beats the children for minor and imagined misdemeanors, seeming to enjoy hurting them. When he tries to beat the hapless Smike, Nicholas beats Squeers instead and runs off with the boy. Squeers is one of Ralph Nickleby's partners, so he comes to London to help retrieve the papers stolen by Peg Sliderskew. There he chances upon Smike and locks the boy in a closet. When all is exposed, Squeers goes to prison.

Young Wackford Squeers

The fat, spoiled son of Mr. and Mrs. Squeers, the young Squeers eats well while the rest of the boys are nearly starved.

Lord Frederick Verisopht

A dashing and dissolute young aristocrat who whiles away idle hours gambling and drinking with Sir Mulberry Hawk. Verisopht, too, is smitten with Kate, but he has the good breeding to withdraw when she does not encourage him. In fact, Verisopht attempts to foil Hawk's designs on her, thus instigating a duel, in which he is shot and killed by his former friend.

Themes

Money

Ralph Nickleby is a prototype for Ebeneezer Scrooge, the covetous miser of *A Christmas Carol.* Having himself lived the life of a poor child forced to work in a shoe blackening company at a young age, Dickens was fascinated by the power and influence of money, with its potential to push bad men to the point of irretrievable corruption and evil. The nineteenth century was a period obsessed with money and ways to make it, as capitalism hit its stride. Investment opportunities existed throughout the burgeoning British Empire—both legitimate and not. Dickens's novel appealed to a wide public, fascinated with the amassing of wealth that bought status and power. And, regardless of their own financial status, they could join in approbation of his avaricious villains and their rapacious manner of swindling their fellow citizens. Money concerns lie at the heart of almost every problem in *Nicholas Nickleby*, from the break-up of the Mantalinis to Kate's vulnerability to Sir Mulberry Hawk. Daughters and unwanted children are particularly at risk when a family cannot provide for them, and avaricious people like Ralph profit from the innocence of others. Dickens seems to be saying that families in the Preface to the 1848 edition of *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*.

Some sort of education was needed for poor children, so Dickens also worked toward establishing a public school system for this purpose. His efforts were gratified with the establishment in 1844 of the Ragged School Union, a program for running schools for poor children in London and other crowded cities. Dickens later praised this program in several issues of his weekly news magazine,

Household Words.

The Change of Heart

The change of heart is a common theme in the novels of Charles Dickens. In fact, the moment of climax usually involves the complete transformation of a formerly wicked character who has had a sudden epiphany about his own evil actions. The stages of this transformation are symbolically outlined in his work *A Christmas Carol.* Ebeneezer Scrooge undergoes three realizations: 1) that he has lost his connection to other people, 2) that he is causing suffering to others, and 3) that his heart will be assessed after his death. In *A Christmas Carol,* the three stages are marshalled in by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future. His connections to his deceased sister and to his fiancée remind him of the power of love, seeing the suffering he has caused the Marley family reminds him of his mistakes, and seeing his own gravestone causes him to reflect upon his day of reckoning. With these three crucial stages accomplished, Scrooge experiences a transformation from an embittered and selfish miser to a paragon of generosity and kindness. In *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby,*

written five years before *A Christmas Carol,* Ralph Nickleby undergoes the same three realizations, although his transformation is temporary and aborted by suicide. First, Ralph Nickleby feels an echo of human connection when he looks into Kate's eyes and sees her resemblance to his dead brother. This connection allows him to see the pain he has caused her through exposing her to Hawk's unwelcome advances. He gets a second dose of guilt when he learns that Smike is the son he had sent away years ago; this knowledge puts a new face on his abuse of Smike as a means to punish his nephew Nicholas. With these two realizations, Ralph can no longer distance himself from the suffering he has caused to others. In a soliloquy, Ralph weighs his life decisions in the scales of judgment and finds himself wanting. He muses about the man he might have become, had he raised Smike himself, and then realizes that the boy must overcome the obstacle of poverty in order for the society to be a moral one.

School Reform

Dickens, a reformist who targeted many of the social inequities of Victorian England, originally intended his serially published novel *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839) to attract attention to the abuses being committed in schools for castoff children in the Yorkshire area. He had gathered information about the problem by interviewing several Yorkshire schools, in the guise of someone wanting to board his children at one of them. He was appalled by the conditions of the children and of the license taken by their schoolmasters. Dickens said that Squeers and Dotheboys Hall were, as Dickens reported in his 1848 Preface, "faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible." With no government funding, the schools relied on collecting school fees from the neglecting parents themselves and on contributions from the few benefactors who might have some interest in the well-being of unwanted children, many of whom were illegitimate or physically deformed. It was a cottage industry that attracted the worst sort, those willing to line their pockets by skimming the tuition of unfortunate and un sponsored children. Ten years after its original publication in monthly serial form, Dickens took credit for reducing the number of Yorkshire schools has been taught to hate his very name instead. Because he feels condemned by the hatred of his son, he cannot imagine redemption, and so he kills himself.

Style

Filmic Staging

Edgar perfected several forms of theatrical presentation that resemble filmic methods, such as the "zoom lens" effect, scenic cuts, and superimposed scenes. Through a combination of stage arrangement, lighting, and juxtaposition, *Nicholas Nickleby* simulates film, as when separate episodes are displayed simultaneously, indicating that actions are occurring in separate parts of London at the same time. Often, these juxtapositions underscore a thematic connection as well. For example, in one scene Noggs overhears Ralph plotting with Arthur Gride to split Madeline's inheritance in return for arranging her to marry Gride, while Mr. Charles and Mr. Ned Cheeryble arrange for Nicholas to help extract the same girl from poverty. In this case, the benevolence of the Cheerbyles, who seek to give their money away, is contrasted with Ralph's grasping for money that he obtains through the most nefarious means. A shift in lighting and sound transfers attention from one group to the other, while keeping both situations in the mind and eye of

the audience. The contrast becomes more intense and obvious because of this juxtaposition. In another scene, Nicholas and Smike practice their lines from *Romeo and Juliet* while Ralph ruthlessly withdraws his investment from two businessmen, ruining their business, and Mrs. Nickleby informs Kate that she must dine with her uncle that night. Smike's line, "My poverty and not my will consents," referring to the starving apothecary's decision to sell poison to Romeo, takes on added significance when applied to Kate's necessity to follow her uncle's command to dine with him, again, out of destitution. David Edgar termed this kind of double entendre "referential irony," which is a form of dramatic irony in that the audience understands more than the characters do, such that words expressed innocently take on a secondary importance. Any double entendre refers to a second meaning, but in Edgar's juxtapositions, the second context involves a deeper meaning expressly because of its application to that other context, which is enhanced by the interweaving effect of the two story lines.

The Influence of Epic Theater

Following Bertold Brecht's concept of "epic theater," theater designed to disrupt the spell of theatrical illusion and turn the spectator into a judge who retains the sense of watching a dramatic performance, Edgar draws attention to the play *as* a play. One of these methods is self-referential narration, in which an actor steps out of character to deliver an aside to the audience, commenting on the action. This happens frequently in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Various characters step "out front" to present summary narration, an effect that reminds the audience that the original source of the work was a novel, since the narration comprises segments of Dickens's own writing. In addition, some of the characters, especially Nicholas himself, speak of themselves in the third person, again drawing attention to the artificial construct of the play. The purpose of such disruption for

Brecht was to awaken the audience to the social ills portrayed by the play by discouraging the passivity of watching for entertainment, generating instead a kind of "complex seeing" so that, while following the action of the plot, the viewer also judges how and why the playwright is presenting this spectacle. David Edgar acknowledged the influence that Brechtian theater has had on his works, calling Brecht's legacy "part of the air we breathe." Before undertaking *Nicholas Nickleby*, Edgar had written a number of "agitprop" plays, social reformist plays that were produced in small theaters. But, recognizing the limitations of agitprop, he decided to stage theatrical "spectacles" that would more aptly portray the workings of society itself and then present complex social issues to a wider audience. *Nicholas Nickleby* portrays a number of important social themes. In an interview with theater critic Elizabeth Swain, Edgar identifies some of them, calling the play a "show which is highly ambivalent about riches, highly antagonistic towards moneymaking, in favor of schoolboys against schoolmasters, in favor of employees against employers, in many respects, in favor of actors against directors, in favor of women against men, and servants against masters." Many of these themes appear in the Dickens original, yet Edgar wants to cast some doubt on Dickens's moralizing. Edgar uses the art of "disillusion" to problematize the hopefulness of Dickens's story. Edgar explains, "One of the absolute reasons that we wanted to preserve the distance between the adaptation and the original work is to say, actually we think Dickens is being a bit optimistic." By using Brechtian theatrical methods, disrupting the viewer's engagement in the plot so that the themes are portrayed in bold relief, *Nickleby* becomes both entertainment and instruction. Unlike Brecht, however, whose works attracted only a small coterie of Brecht fans, Edgar sought and found a larger audience, which he accomplished by producing an epic play, a spectacle consisting of over one hundred and thirty parts, with hundreds of costumes and wigs, a lavish and costly production. Edgar considered this break from Brechtian tradition worth it, discovering that his work could be "popular and serious and social at the same time."

Historical Context

Industrial Revolution

During what is commonly termed the "Industrial Revolution," England witnessed the explosion of capitalism in the economy of the British Empire. Adam Smith had published his *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, but it took nearly a hundred years for what he called the "invisible hand" of individuals pursuing their own self-interest for their accumulating wealth to have an appreciable effect on the British economy and thus on the everyday lives of individual Britons. By the time Dickens was writing, mills, factories, and workshops had sprung into being in every major city, attracting menial laborers from the agricultural environs to the cities, where they hoped to earn a better livelihood. As Dickens chronicled, for the majority of workers, such hopes went most dismally unmet. It was the factory owners and managers who profited from Smith's capitalist ideas, while the average workingman, woman, and child suffered in ways they could not have suffered on the farm. Social reformists such as Dickens promoted schools and workhouses to aid workers in bettering their lives, while the parliament attempted to legislate humanitarian conditions. Gradually, conditions improved, and women gained a measure of autonomy when they were able to earn wages as an alternative to marrying.

Women in Victorian England

The women's suffrage movement, attempting to gain the right to vote for women, had its beginnings in the Victorian era, specifically after 1867. However, the prevalent image of the "Home Goddess" (Dickens's term) prevailed; the "Home Goddess" was the dainty woman of the house, who through compliant sweetness managed the household and did not interfere with her husband's world. This image coexisted with the predominant ideology that women were intellectually inferior to men. They were valued not for their intellect but for their efficiency in the "separate sphere" of the household and for maintaining decorum under any circumstance. Thus Kate Nickleby cannot assertively confront Sir Mulberry Hawk for accosting her but must plead with her uncle to protect her, and she serves as an idealized mother figure and angelic supporter for both Smike and her brother Nicholas. Women had few political or economic rights: a woman could not vote or initiate a divorce or get a formal education; and property and children belonged to the husband. It would not be until after World War I, when women were needed to fill the gap left by men fighting and dying in the trenches, that they would win the vote (1918), and another ten years would pass before they achieved full political equality.

Social Reform

The nineteenth century saw a series of legislation aimed at ameliorating social problems resulting from the Industrial Revolution and its accompanying migration of low-wage

workers to the cities. The Poor Law of 1834 canceled the government dole for the poor and relegated them to separate workhouses for men, women, and children. The intention was to force poor people to become independent and for the father of a family to provide for his wife and children, but conditions in the workhouses bred disease, fatigue, and accidents, and the law required wives, too, to enter the workhouse when their husbands could not provide for them; thus poor families usually were unable to break out of the poverty cycle. The Marriage Act of 1836 made it easier for the poor to acquire legal married status, another measure aimed at fostering responsibility in poor families. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 made divorce easier (it had been a "privilege" of the rich), but although a man could divorce his wife for adultery, women could only initiate a divorce under the most heinous of conditions—adultery was not enough. Two Factory Acts (1842, 1847) reduced working hours and prevented women and children from working in mines. The Matrimonial Property Acts (1870, 1882) conferred a woman's right to control her own property. Two Reform Bills (1833, 1867) expanded the electorate to include wider representation in the House of Commons.

Charles Dickens was a parliamentary reporter during a time of considerable transformation in the spirit of social responsibility in Britain. He also wrote for the newspapers that sprang into being to feed a public hungry for information about the changing policies of the government. Caught up in the general movement toward greater social responsibility, Dickens both recorded and inspired social reform in England.

Critical Overview

The original story of Nicholas Nickleby was produced in serial form and printed in twenty monthly parts. It was so popular that Dickens had to issue a proclamation threatening "summary and terrible reprisal" for those who might publish the story under another name. It was his most popular novel to date, and it sold 50,000 copies in short order. When Dickens became even more popular, he performed readings from *Nickleby,* to audiences that "roared" with approval.

Edgar was by no means the first playwright to stage an adaptation of the Dickens novel. In fact, Dickens himself attended the first dramatization, adapted by Edward Stirling and produced by Frederick Yates in London at the Adelphi Theatre in 1838. The production ran for over one hundred performances, and Dickens deemed it "admirably done in every respect." Another production, by William Moncrieff in 1839, did not earn his approval because it revealed information that had not yet come out in Dickens's serialized story of Nicholas—that Smike was Ralph's son. For this breach, Dickens retaliated in a subsequent serial issue: in chapter 48, Dickens attacks dramatists who transcribe a work from one medium or language to another with little change and then take credit (and profit) for the result. David Edgar, adapting the Dickens piece a century and a half later, himself felt criticized for taking the "easy way" of adaptation. In a 1980 article for the *Times* (as quoted in *Plays from the Contemporary British Theater*), Edgar wrote, "I met the full force of the prejudice that has always existed against the transformation of literature from one medium to another. My work, I was told, had ceased to be 'original.' It was assumed that I was only doing it for the money, or that I was 'marking time' while I developed a 'proper idea.'" Edgar wants his work to be judged as a real play, and his contemporary critics have done just that.

David Edgar worked closely with two talented directors, Trevor Nunn and John Caird, as well as forty-five members of the cast of the original Royal Shakespeare Company production in developing the script for the dramatic version of *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*. The group read the novel together and then rehearsed it scene by scene, with Edgar writing and rewriting the play as the ideas evolved among a rather disparate group of talented artists, including actors, directors, and writer. As Edgar acknowledged, it was a collaborative effort: "It's not a personal statement; it's Dickens having been passed through a filter of 45 people and written down by me." The production ran at the Aldwych Theatre for six weeks, followed in 1981 with two equally successful runs of six weeks each, with audiences often giving fifteen-minute standing ovations. The play won the Society of West End Theatres award for best play, even though the London reviews generally were mixed. Michael Billington of the *Guardian* questioned the judiciousness of adapting a Dickens novel, commenting, "the RSC has come up with a perverse and needless triumph: a great deal of skill and imagination has been expended on the creation of something that gains only marginally, if at all, from being seen rather than read. Undeniably this *Nicholas Nickleby* has been done well. My question is: should it have been done at all?" Some reviewers found the play desultory and over-long, while Bernard Levin of the *Sunday Times* proclaimed that London had never seen anything "so richly joyous.... life-enhancing, yea-saying and fecund, so....

Dickensian." The New York Broadway production ran for fourteen weeks and won the Antoinette Perry ("Tony") Award and the New York Drama Critics' Circle award for best play in 1982. The production was filmed for television in 1983 by director Jim Goddard and produced by Colin Callender. This made-for-television version boasts Peter Ustinov as host, but *Time* reviewer Richard Corliss complained that the filming left the viewer feeling as though he has just seen "a pageant through a peephole" because television cannot reproduce the spectacle of the stage. Nevertheless, the televised version of *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* won an Emmy Award nomination from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 1983. Although the Edgar version seemed to "belong" to the Royal Shakespeare Company of London, the Great Lakes Shakespeare Company of Cleveland, Ohio, produced a very successful show in 1982. A 1985 revival by the Royal Shakespeare Company (with a different cast) once again demanded top ticket prices of one hundred dollars and once again convinced audiences, according to a *Time* review by William A. Henry III in 1986, that "Nickleby may be the most jubilant and thrilling experience to be had in a theater." Expensive and exhausting both to produce and to watch, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* nonetheless stands as a triumph of socially uplifting theater.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Hamilton is an English teacher at Cary Academy, an innovative private college preparatory school in Cary, North Carolina. In this essay, Hamilton examines the effect of financial difficulties on Victorian families as represented in Edgar's adaptation of the Charles Dickens novel, The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby.

Charles Dickens grew up in a family with eight children, a family that continually struggled to make ends meet. At the age of twelve, he had to work in a shoe blacking factory while his father served time in debtor's prison. Not surprisingly, Charles Dickens shared the Victorian fascination with money: with ways of getting it and how money problems affected family relationships. The original title of *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* emphasizes these two concerns, for it continued, "Containing a Faithful Account of the Fortunes, Misfortunes, Uprisings, Downfallings and Complete Career of the Nickleby Family, edited by 'Boz.'" The inclusion of the word "family" is significant, as is the pun of the family name that suggests that the family sought their living "nickel by nickel." Furthermore, the title words such as "uprisings" and "downfallings" cast the family history in the terms of a financial stock. Clearly, Dickens equated family fortune with financial fortune, and his readers enthusiastically followed the ups and downs of the Nickleby family fortune as each of the twenty serialized chapters appeared in monthly installments. Although the novel was not one of his best-structured works, being a rambling series of disconnected episodes, its desultoriness suits the theme of financial ups and downs. Like stock investments, the fad of Victorian financiers, the Nickleby family quest for fortune takes many twists and turns and often succeeds by mere chance. Dickens records a society as it makes a transition from the clarity and predictability of inherited fortune to becoming a society in which fortunes can be made but with little or no predictability other than that the blind pursuit of fortune destroys families. He does this by portraying a series of families and the various harms that come to them as they put financial gain above the sanctity of the family.

One of the worst effects of the pursuit of money on the family unit portrayed by *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* is separation. When Nicholas departs from his mother and sister for remote Yorkshire to take a post as assistant at a boys' school, he leaves them unprotected, and Kate becomes vulnerable to the unwanted attentions of Sir Mulberry Hawk. Nicholas himself moves from a

healthy, natural family situation to the hodge-podge of miserable, unwanted children and their cruel guardians that constitute the "family" of Dotheboys Hall. The contrast lies at the heart of the Victorian social problem—that the nuclear family was being threatened and could not be replaced. In addition, Nicholas's peregrinations do not bring him the wealth he seeks. He never obtains financial security until he returns to his family, takes up again his role of protector of the women, and generates another family tie, that of marrying the heiress Madeline Bray.

The Kenwigs family demonstrates the interpersonal strains that financial worries cause in families. The Kenwigs are a warm, loving family, with the virtue of hospitality that they

naturally extend to Nicholas. They rejoice at the birth of a fifth child, even though it means another mouth to feed. However, their worries about their daughters preoccupy them so much that it distorts their relationship with the one relative who might offer them a secure future. The Kenwigs patronize Uncle Lillyvick in the hope that he will confer his inheritance on their daughters. They urge their pretty daughter Morleena to kiss him and jump to attention at his frequent criticisms. Instead of Uncle Lillyvick enjoying the respect due to him as an elderly relation, the family bends to mollify his every whim. In effect, their obsequiousness has turned him into a peevish and miserable person. Through the portrayal of the Kenwigs, Dickens demonstrates how family power relationships are distorted by need. They experience the height of family betrayal, in Victorian terms, when he elopes with an actress. And they enjoy the classic Victorian happy ending—a reunited, financially secure family—when he returns and promises, "I shall settle on your children all these moneys I once planned to leave them in my will."

The Bray family demonstrates the worst-case family scenario, in which a father "sells" his daughter into marriage. Walter Bray has squandered his fortune through his dissolute lifestyle, yet his innocent daughter Madeline still reveres him, true to the Victorian ideal of the all-suffering daughter and woman. She willingly goes along with his arrangement to marry Arthur Gride, a lecherous old man of seventy-five. Nicholas identifies her decision as a contest between family and money, and he warns her that "the most degraded poverty is better than the misery you'd undergo as wife to such a man as this." Her misguided resolve stems from the hope that her act will release her father "not from this place, but from the jaws of death," for poverty is killing his will to live. Like the impoverished apothecary who is forced by his own poverty to consent to sell poison to Romeo, Madeline is forced by poverty to consent to an unhappy marriage. She fails to realize that money alone cannot repair the damage that poverty has caused, and she fails to realize that her desperation would have desecrated her new "family," thus extending the cycle of misery, had Nicholas not saved her.

Dickens also portrays families that manage to evade the effects of financial insolvency, at least for a time. The theatrical Crummles family is, as Lillyvick exclaims at the wedding they host for him, "chock full of blessings and phenomena." The Crummleses are generous to Nicholas, paying him one pound a week to act and write scripts for them, and welcoming to anyone who joins their path. Their instant acceptance of Smike is one of the most heartwarming events in the play. They feed, clothe, and employ a child who had been undernourished, beaten, and misused by the Squeers. In more ways than this, the Crummles family is the antithesis of the Squeer "family." The Crummles family, too, is a hodge-podge: the Crummles entourage includes a myriad of actors they have picked up during their travels. But in the Crummles "family," each member has his or her own skill or talent, and each is welcome at the expansive dinner table, even though the Crummleses live hand-to-mouth as they travel from one theatrical engagement to another. But, like the revised happy endings they tack onto every dramatic piece they perform, they are living in a fantasy world that has little relevancy to real life. It is they who seal the vows between Lillyvick and Miss Petowker, and it is they who harbor the actor she runs away with, leaving Lillyvick hurt and alone. They flaunt the rules of conventional social institutions. They cannot even accept the maturation of their "infant phenomenon," a girl of fifteen who has been playing the role

of a ten-year-old for more than five years. Nicholas finds solace for a time at the breast of this family, but while he acts the part of Romeo, his sister is being stalked by the vile Sir Mulberry Hawk. Her situation is compared to that of Juliet, when her parents announce her arranged marriage, while she is secretly in love with Romeo.

Edgar emphasizes the parallels by having the players enact the *Romeo and Juliet* scene all around Kate, and the lines meant for Juliet take on an ironic double meaning when applied to Kate. The apothecary's line, "Who calls so loud?" initiates the only moment in the play that Ralph exhibits true familial concern, for it is spoken just as he looks at Kate's hair, rumpled during her escape from Hawk. Noggs narrates, "And Ralph Nickleby, who was proof against all appeals of blood and kindred—who was steeled against every tale of sorrow and distress—staggered while he looked, and reeled back into the house, as a man who had seen a spirit from a world beyond the grave." The line from *Romeo and Juliet,* "who calls so loud?" seems to imply a calling to conscience for Ralph, who momentarily experiences a family bond. It also calls to Nicholas, who has been living in a fantasy world, separated from his sister, who clearly needs his presence to protect her. In the beginning of Act 2, Mr. Crummles admits that he thinks his family should settle down, for, as he points out, "we're not immortal." His words lead Nicholas to feel a pang of worry about his mother and sister. He has been brought back down to earth, and, as he tells Smike, he rues "the time we have spent dallying here." Perhaps Dickens is expressing his own guilt for having indulged himself in playwriting while he was at Wellington House Academy, soon after his father's release from debtor's prison. He was to be forced to leave school when his family once again fell on hard times. Autobiographical connections aside, including the Crummles family in *Nicholas Nickleby* demonstrates that the idealized family is little more than a fantasy, one that Nicholas ultimately rejects in favor of taking responsibility for his mother and sister.

To further emphasize the mistake of delusional fantasy, Dickens presents the mismatched couple of Mr. and Mrs. Mantalini. Mr. Mantalini hides his peccadilloes behind a mask of insincerity that reaches comic proportions as he calls his wife everything from a "rose in a demd flowerpot" to "juice of pine-apple." For years he has been frittering away the money his wife earns from her milliner's shop, as the workers and Miss Knag all realize. However, Mrs. Mantalini continually forgives him, taken in by his ridiculous remonstrances of undying love and his lame, staged "attempts" to kill himself. It is only when creditors begin the process of foreclosure—when money problems prevail—that she assesses the situation realistically and separates from him. However, Mrs. Mantalini shows great financial astuteness; she has taken the precaution of signing over the shop to Miss Knag so that it will not revert to him, since the Victorian marriage laws proscribed married women from owning property themselves. Through the portrayal of the Mantalinis, Dickens condemns this policy and demonstrates that granting too much power to dissolute husbands licenses profligacy and destroys the foundation of a marriage. A better model is one that evenhandedly distributes power and does not impinge the woman's freedom to find a new mate when her husband proves unsuitable.

Ironically, the proper familial spirit is portrayed in *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* not by a family but by a pair of brothers, the Cheerybles. The need for true

"Brotherhood" is underscored by the fact that the book opens and closes with two very different sets of brothers. Dickens suggests that the antithetical Nickleby brothers, Ralph and Godfrey, who pursue separate life paths, should have behaved like Ned and Charles Cheeryble, who act like twins and who cooperate to earn money and also care enough about others to share their riches. The brothers Cheeryble "adopt" Madeline and rescue her, with the assistance of Nicholas as a go-between. Like the Crummles, the brothers accept their fellow humans as they are and offer brotherly love and fatherly help. They even produce a husband for Kate, in the form of their nephew Frank. In contrast, Ralph Nickleby fails in every familial role: he refuses aid to his brother's family and attempts to destroy Nicholas for defying him, which essentially is to say that Ralph hates Nicholas for valuing family above money. Ralph's worst anti-family acts are to "sell" his niece to cement a business relationship and to give up his own child without a moment of remorse until after the child is dead. All of his failed family relationships stem from avarice, for money holds the place in his values system that family should hold. Nicholas, through the "Uprisings and Downfallings" of his "life and adventures," discovers that his family means more to him than fortune, and he feels unable to marry Madeline, for fear that she might think her wealth attracted him. Of course, his virtue is rewarded both with marriage and money. The play also demonstrates that when families break apart to pursue financial security at the price of family stability, these fissures form cracks in the larger family of society, but that upholding family and brotherly love brings its own form of prosperity.

Source: Carole Hamilton, Critical Essay on *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Monahan operates The Inkwell Works, an editorial service, and teaches English literature at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. In this essay, Monahan places David Edgar's adaptation of the Charles Dickens novel in its historical context and explains its stage success in terms of production techniques Edgar devised to translate the novel's Victorian insights to the 1970s English stage.

The first inkling of an English stage production of Dickens occurred to director Trevor Nunn when he visited the Soviet Union in 1977 and realized the Gorky Theater was engaged in transforming *The Pickwick Papers* into drama. Nunn discovered, in fact, that stage productions of Dickens were commonly done in the Soviet Union. Two years later, in England, Nunn, along with co-director John Caird, began to pool ideas for a similar venture. The hope was to create a play that presented on stage the whole of a Charles Dickens novel. The novel of choice was *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby.* There was only one choice for the playwright: the socialist, activist, and extraordinarily prolific David Edgar, who had just completed two adaptations, *Mary Barnes* and *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* (both written in 1978). These works, along with Edgar's known fascination for agitprop technique, suggested that his approach would resonate naturally with the social justice theme in Charles Dickens's novel.

Staging Dickens's work was not a new idea, however. In fact, during the novelist's life, many adaptations of his plays were produced, and existing copyright laws did not protect his work from these truncated reproductions. What made the present idea unique was the aspiration to present the entire novel on the stage, to leave out nothing. The play was ultimately performed in two parts by The Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre in London in 1980, entailing thirty-nine actors playing 123 speaking parts in ninety-five scenes, lasting eight and a half hours. Reviewing the play for the London *Sunday Times,* Bernard Levin wrote:

> This production . . . is a tribute to England's greatest writer of prose and of the teeming world he conjured up . . . It is a celebration of love and justice that is true to the spirit of Dickens' belief that those are the fulcrums on which the universe is moved.

This essay introduces readers to some of the bridge-making strategies David Edgar used to bring Dickens to the stage and connect his nineteenth-century text to the 1970s world of English theatergoers.

If not immediately upon its opening, then immediately after Levin's positive review, Edgar's play was an extraordinary success. It had two more runs in England, from November 13, 1980, to January 3, 1981, and again from April 23 to June 20, 1981, and then the play had a fourteen-week run in New York City, opening September 23, 1981. It played in Cleveland, in Chicago, and then, on December 10, 1983, it opened in Sidney,

Australia. David Edgar's *Nicholas Nickleby* was a phenomenon, a unique stage experience, both contemporary and Victorian, both socialistic and sentimental. The play won awards both in England and in the United States. It was, moreover, a perfect vehicle for some of the deeply held dramatic and ethical convictions of the man who reconceived it.

In his interview with Elizabeth Swain, included in her book *David Edgar: Playwright and Politician* (1986), Edgar pointed out that his parents conceived him just two doors up the street from the address at which Charles Dickens (1812-1870) wrote *Nicholas Nickleby.* This coincidence seemed in line with other affinities between the playwright and novelist. Born 112 years after the novel's composition and coming of age in the turbulent protest-driven 1960s, Edgar developed his own brand of Dickensian outrage at human cruelty, and as of 2001 he has written over sixty pieces, many of which were carefully researched and designed to foreground individuals caught in historical events. Like Dickens, Edgar wrote in social protest, casting a spotlight on injustice, abuse, and oppression. Like Dickens in Victorian England, Edgar in the England of the 1970s and 1980s tried to change public consciousness by exposing what people may well not have seen on their own. The two adaptations Edgar wrote for the stage immediately preceding *Nicholas Nickleby* are examples.

The play *Mary Barnes* is a stage adaptation of the psychological case history, *Mary Barnes: Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness,* which was co-authored by the schizophrenic and successful painter, Mary Barnes, and her doctor, Joseph Berke. The play, like the book, dramatizes the apparent cure of Barnes who was treated at Kingsley Hall (1965-1970), following the nurturing guidelines of R. D. Laing, while it criticizes conventional shock treatment therapy. The second adaptation by Edgar brought to the stage Albie Sachs's account of his imprisonment in South Africa, *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*. A Jewish lawyer who defended opponents of apartheid, Sachs was held in solitary confinement for three years without ever being charged with a crime. In each of these cases, Edgar turned the spotlight on an important individual and social issue.

As a socialist, Edgar also brought to the production of *Nicholas Nickleby* his fascination with the early 1970s technique called agitprop. The term itself, according to Swain, derives from the Soviet idea that agitation and propaganda are effective forms of shaping public opinion. Agitprop technique can be used in various ways, but the part Edgar used entails presenting a significant problem to an audience and inviting the audience to participate. The point is to engage the audience in protest, to reveal a social evil, an oppression, or injustice, and to invite viewers to react. One scene in *Nicholas Nickleby* illustrates this technique.

In Edgar's play, an early scene shows a meeting of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company. In the production of the Edgar's play, some actors integrate the audience, object loudly to the on-stage action, and encourage members of the audience to join them as they throw muffins onto the stage in protest. The top hats on stage are capitalists, moneymakers, who exploit their workers and the starving street people. By inference, the people in the audience become the exploited ones who protest the meeting. Thus, the play begins with this

dramatic display of an idea, economic exploitation, and it invites an interaction of challenge and protest by aligning the audience with the underdogs.

Another important topic for the novel and the play is the abusive proprietary schools in nineteenth-century Yorkshire. Like Edgar, Dickens researched his subjects before he dramatized them in his writings. Charles Dickens began as a journalist, and like a journalist preparing a story, he investigated the Yorkshire boys' schools, the originals upon which his Dotheboys Hall is based. In the Author's Preface to the novel, Dickens explains how he pretended to be a gentleman looking for such a school in order to get a firsthand impression of what they were like. The Preface also explains that while Dickens was intent on "calling public attention to the system" that perpetrated "atrocities" far worse than any depicted in the novel, he also acknowledges that these schools had been severely reduced by lawsuits brought against them.

The character of Smike, the handicapped, supposedly mentally retarded boy whom Nicholas befriends at the school and later discovers to be his cousin, the abandoned son of Ralph Nickleby, has a crucial role in arousing sympathy for the dispossessed and rejected and for asserting the human connection and social responsibility that these writers valued. Smike is the one who clarifies for Dickens's readers and for Edgar's audience the poignancy of the outcast. In part 1, act 1, scene 13, Smike says he was with his friend Dorker when Dorker died. Smike says: "I was with him at the end, he asked for me. Who will I ask for? Who?" While Nicholas does not yet understand the magnitude of Smike's isolation, Smike is drawing attention to the fact that when he dies, he will have no one in the world to ask for. As if to explain further to Nicholas, Smike continues: "O-U-T-C-A-S-T. A noun. Substantive. Person cast out or rejected. Abject. And forsaken. Homeless. Me."

For much of the play, Nicholas's main concern is making enough money to support himself, his widowed mother, and his unmarried sister Kate. But he takes upon himself Smike, takes up his cause immediately in his decision to beat the sadistic Squeers who runs the school, and in the staging, Nicholas literally carries Smike on his back as they escape. That Smike turns out to be the cousin of Nicholas fulfills, on the literal level, an important thematic point: across class and other hierarchies, human beings are connected, are related, are responsible for one another. Additionally, the central refusal of Uncle Ralph to help Nicholas is seriously qualified when it becomes clear that Ralph earlier refused to care for his own son. In all, the revelation of abuse and injustice is intended to call readers and playgoers to a higher vision, one of brotherhood and shared responsibility.

The production uses two devices that allow Edgar to compress large amounts of text and emphasize meaning through juxtaposition: one is narration, either imbedded in the dialogue or delivered like a chorus refrain, and the other is a manner of open staging that allows one scene to melt into another without conventional breaks. The play's dialogue includes narrative passages rendered in the third person. These summarize action and intention, much as Dickens might have written them. Then, too, Edgar devised a platform for moving furniture up or down stage; thus, scenes could "fade out" without really ending, since, as the room withdraws to the back of the stage space,

actors may continue to appear to play out the scene that space defines. Similarly, actors could by their costumes and actions create a sense of place, which can envelope and then be superimposed upon a previous scene. These two techniques, narration and what might be called scene blending, allowed Edgar to compress quickly and highlight meaning in the meandering epic plot of Dickens's novel. In each of these techniques, Edgar takes the opportunity to render new interpretation through rearrangement and juxtaposition. One example may serve as illustration.

The Crummles theatrical troupe's production of *Romeo and Juliet,* a happy-ending adaptation by Nicholas, employs Smike in the role of the apothecary. Dickens and Edgar manipulate the Elizabeth an play-within-the-play device for thematic purposes. Smike's lines include the question, "Who calls so loud?" (part 1, act 2, scene 16), which echoes his earlier question to Nicholas when they are still at Dotheboys Hall. Moreover, Edgar has the presentation of the tragedy alternate with a London scene in which Ralph Nickleby experiences a rare sense of human feeling while he hands his niece, Kate, into her carriage. The Crummles actors engulf Ralph and Kate, act around them. So as Ralph is pondering Kate, Edgar's audience watches Smike (Ralph's abandoned son) call out. The juxtaposition of the scenes extends the idea of tragedy from the Shakespeare play to the Nickleby plot, as it parallels Smike's vulnerability with Kate's. The ideas that money can disrupt familial ties, that love can connect people across barriers, and that disconnection or connecting across those barriers can extract great cost are thematic for Shakespeare's play, for Dickens, for Edgar. In Edgar's play, these thematic issues are underscored again when Smike dies, a scene in which the apothecary lines are used another way, this time to suggest that Smike hears a call from Heaven.

Narration summarizes and interprets. In the London scene with Ralph and Kate, which co-occurs with the Shakespeare production, Edgar has Ralph's secretary, Newman Noggs, step forward to describe Ralph's reaction to having these human feelings. Noggs states: "And Ralph Nickleby, who was proof against all appeals of blood and kindred—who was steeled against every tale of sorrow and distress—staggered while he looked, and reeled back into the house, as a man who had seen a spirit from a world beyond the grave." Like scene directions in a play, like the prose description a novelist uses, Noggs's words suggest that Ralph has seen a ghost, and they also point to an important, albeit sentimental, idea: even the most hardened person can feel, is capable of moments when point of view shifts and the previously sustained balance with which he holds himself erect becomes precariously endangered.

In his interview with Swain, David Edgar said the novel *Nicholas Nickleby* is about "a time in which industrialization is breaking down old hierarchies and barriers but is leaving people open and naked and uncertain about how they relate one to another." Edgar conveys this uncertainty at the end of the play in which, amid a generally happy conclusion, Nicholas spies another child abandoned in the snow, a new Smike. Against the backdrop of family singing, Nicholas picks up the boy and walks toward the audience with a piercing look in his eye. It is as though in the staging David Edgar has allowed for a happy ending (although it may be "pasted on," as Nicholas's ending of *Romeo and Juliet* is), while at the same moment he arranges the happy ending to be

upstaged by a challenge about human responsibility in the face of continued suffering. In an effort to describe his role as playwright, David Edgar told Swain, "I'd like to be a secretary for the times through which I'm living." In doing so, he purposefully joins hands with Dickens, across genres and across the centuries.

Source: Melodie Monahan, Critical Essay on *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Innes examines a contemporary staging of Nicholas Nickleby *by David Edgar to identify challenges that the play poses for modern theater, and Edgar's solutions to those challenges.*

Perhaps the main reason for the immense popularity of *Nicholas Nickleby* as dramatic material is the theatrical nature of one extended section, in which Nicholas joins up with the Crummles's acting troupe. Originally this was a satirical attack on a well-known actor-manager and his much promoted daughter, who—incredibly—performed Shylock at the incongruous age of 8 just a year before Dickens embarked on the novel. Yet the exaggerated display of Victorian coarse acting makes wonderful farce. It is also a form of metatheatre. Heightening the artifice of stage performance by self-parody has been a traditional comic technique. But this has gained a particular contemporary relevance: exposing the mechanics of stage-business by presenting the whole drama as a play or dealing with characters who are actors, expresses a doubleness of vision and self-referentiality that has become one of the defining qualities of post-modernism. In addition, it is the basis of Bertolt Brecht's dramaturgy, which has had a widespread influence on the younger generation of British playwrights, including David Edgar.

A conventional example of the exploitation of such theatrical elements is provided by a 1969 dramatization at the Glasgow Citizens Theatre. 'Faced with the apparently insoluble problem of editing . . . the rich, shapeless mass of the novel' the adapters used the Crummles's scenes as a frame, others in third-person description. They also formed the 'scenery': grouping to represent the stage-coach in which Nicholas and Smike returned to London, lining up in different configurations across the stage as the walls of various houses that Ralph Nickleby visits, or coalescing into the dark cloud of guilt and retribution that hangs over him, dogging his heels on his final flight through the streets. Thus every aspect of the performance consciously emphasized theatrical pretence, making the medium of expression as much the subject of the drama as the story itself.

Although superficially similar to Brechtian dramaturgy—in the actor stepping out of character, the objective third-person narration, the avoidance of illusion—the result was very different. The world created, being a purely human one, was psychological, symbolic, an imaginary projection. It was also shown as conditional, rather than presented as a fixed reality, by the concept of the play as a communal product. So that the actors

> —who knew how it was to end—were expressing a huge collective 'wouldn't it be good if' aspiration, as they watched and told the unfolding events. This distancing device, which in Brecht is supposed to clear the mind of emotion, had in our case the effect of directing and deepening the audience's own visceral longing for Ralph's vision of the world to be disproved.

This emotional response was intensified by the physical involvement of the audience in the action. The cast entered through the spectators at the beginning of each performance, and the two-tier set extended out into the auditorium. Built out of a rough wooden scaffolding—specifically an acting-space, rather than scenery, requiring spectators to participate imaginatively by visualizing the various settings—the upper level ran all the way around the front of the mezzanine. The chase-scenes in each half of the play took place above the heads and in the middle of the audience. Compounding this, Edgar shifted the focus of the story from Dickens's hero to the pitiful Smike, the abused boy Nicholas rescues from the inhuman Yorkshire school.

Like the part of Oliver Twist, the role of Smike had traditionally been played by women to bring out the pathos of Dickens's characterization (a practice that continued up until the 1920s). In the novel Smike is described as starving, dispirited and simpleminded, his only physical impairment being a slight lameness. In order to deny Dickensian sentimentality, Edgar exaggerated his disabilities. Smike became an infantile schizophrenic, crippled almost to the point of paralysis. Although some critics felt through which the story could be accommodated to the stage:

> Like so many authors tackling their first play or novel, Nicholas's answer to the demand that he write a script is to make it strictly autobiographical.The Crummles Company, unaware of the involvement of the two principals in the events of the real life story, play it out with gusto for a miserly speculator whom they hope will discharge their debts.

However, distancing the action like this defused any possible social criticism, reducing the story to the level of a comically anachronistic acting display.

By contrast, Edgar's version emphasized the political immediacy of Dickens's material by making the production itself a prism, with the overt theatricality giving a multiple perspective to every scene. The whole cast of 49 actors was present on stage throughout the action: interjecting commentary, visibly supplying sound effects, and (above all) observing the scenes. As Edgar put it, the central concept of the adaptation was 'that the acting company were in collective possession of an entire story, which they were then to tell to the audience'; and their silent reactions conditioned the audience's response as they stood 'watching their story unfold'. Passages of narration that linked the episodes were spoken by the onlookers as a group, with the lines divided among them; apart from Nicholas and his sister, each of the actors played multiple parts; and they continually stepped out of their roles to narrate the characters' feelings about themselves or that the bravura performance of the role (David Threlfall in the first production) unbalanced the whole dramatization, the effect was central to Edgar's thematic intentions Smike literally embodied the deforming effects of an unjust society. The audience's initial revulsion at his grotesquely distorted and drooling figure, which associated them subliminally with the oppressors, intensified their reactions as the action revealed the victim's real humanity. Emotions evoked for the individual were thus almost automatically turned against the system responsible for his condition. Hence the

spontaneous nightly applause at the point when Nicholas takes revenge on the sadistic schoolmaster, which—unusually for the theatre—signalled approval for the action, rather than appreciation of the performer.

In Edgar's view there were strong parallels between the social contexts of the 1830s and the present, both being periods in which rapid technological change and the disappearance of earlier moral standards under the pressure of capitalist expansion resulted in the exacerbation of inequality and injustice. At the same time (quoting Marx) he rejected the type of solution espoused by Dickens, whose novel incorporated an essential affirmation of existing conditions in its exuberance, and proposed idealized personal charity, innocence and the unexpected inheritance of a modest fortune (concealed by villains) as sufficient for reform. Thus Edgar's adaptation was designed as 'a play about Dickens that criticized his form of social morality, rather than a straight dramatization of the novel'.

This was expressed through subtle changes to Dickens's story, even though in general Edgar's script is remarkably faithful to the novel. Through extensive doubling, practically all Dickens's figures appear, so that the list of characters includes over 120 named parts, plus various groups (and the anonymous populace of London). Although compressed, the dialogue and much of the linking narrative is produced verbatim; and the substance of Dickens's major passages of commentary is included, as well as most of his characters' main speeches. At the same time, the eponymous Cheeryble twins—paragons of charity that even Dickens's contemporaries had criticized as incredible, despite his pointing to their real-life analogues—were downplayed, as was the folly of Nicholas's mother (omitting the comic madman next door, with whom she imagines herself in love). As a result, over two-thirds of the performance time was devoted to the first half of the novel, thus focusing on the more general depictions of inhumanity and corruption in the book—plus the theatrical parody of the Crummles Company—and de-emphasizing the positive pole of Dickens's story. Some scenes, spread out over several installments, were reorganized into continuous units to facilitate the flow of the action. Others, separated in the novel, were interwoven in counterpoint to underline the social criticism; and this was extended by the most significant of Edgar's additions.

These additions were the drawing of political morals from the story, the inclusion of a travestied *Romeo and Juliet* as performed by the Crummles, and the final image of Nicholas holding out a 'new Smike' to the audience. What Nicholas and Kate explicitly learn from their experiences in Edgar's version is the universal corruption and destructiveness of money, declaring that even the kindest and noblest souls are inevitably 'tainted' by its touch. The conclusions of both halves reinforce this by underlining the illusory nature of Dickens's utopian solution. Transforming *Romeo and Juliet* into a travesty in which everyone but Tybalt turns out to be alive after all and Viola is imported from *Twelfth Night* as a substitute bride for Juliet's arranged husband (echoing the worst excesses of eighteenth-century treatments of Shakespeare) provides a graphic image of the spuriousness of happy endings. Similarly, the conventional image of social renewal in the marriages that crown the novel is undercut by presenting the happy couples as a sentimentalized Christmas-card tableau. Along with these false images, the audience is challenged to take action. The first half of the play closes in a

parody of a patriotic Victorian Afterpiece (Mrs Crummles as Britannia) with the injunction:

England, arise:
Join in the chorus!
It is a new-made song you should be singing . . .
See each one do what he can

While the 'New Smike' cradled in Nicholas's arms is intended 'as a reminder that for every Smike you save there are still thousands out there, in the cold'.

What marks Edgar's version of *Nicholas Nickleby* out from previous adaptations is partly the way such political relevance is achieved through exploiting the dramatic form itself, keeping the audience constantly aware of theatrical conventions. The presence—and consciousness—of modern-day actors, as interpreters of a 150-year-old story, simultaneously intensified the audience's emotional involvement and gave a critical perspective on the action. On a still more obvious level, what makes this dramatization unique is the way Edgar's use of overt theatricality enabled the complete novel to be staged in its entirety, although doing so still required eight-and-a-half hours playing time, so that the story was divided into two distinct halves. Exactly the same qualities characterize Christine Edzard's treatment of *Little Dorrit*, but with cinematic elements substituted for the theatricality.

Source: Christopher Innes, "Adapting Dickens to the Modern Eye: *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Little Dorrit,*" in *Novel Images: Literature in Performance,* edited by Peter Reynolds, Routledge, Inc., 1993, pp. 64-79.

Adaptations

Royal Shakespeare Company production was filmed for television in 1982 and is available on video tape in a boxed set consisting of nine 60-minute tapes.

Two BBC productions of Dickens's *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* have been produced, one by Vincent Tilsey in 1957 and one in 1968 by Hugh Leonard. Saxon Lucas and D. Corr produced a "pop opera" called *Smike* for BBC television in 1973. None of these came close to the power and spectacle of the David Edgar production.

Also available on video is the 1947 film directed by Alberto Cavalcanti for Ealing Studios (screenplay by John Dighton), starring Cedric Hardwicke, but it, too, is not as powerful as the televised Royal Shakespeare Company production.

Topics for Further Study

Dickens's novel *Nicholas Nickleby* ends happily, with the siblings' marriages. Why does Edgar change the ending to show a second Smike?

How did the fact that, in nineteenth-century Britain, married women could not own property affect their life choices?

Does Nicholas's fractious personality detract from his character? Explain your point of view.

What is the role of money in this play?

Compare and Contrast

Early Nineteenth Century: It is nearly impossible for people born into poverty to escape it, although the growth of cities and factory jobs lures many to attempt to work their way out of destitution. The lack of employment regulations puts men, women, and children into dangerous jobs, where they literally risk life and limb. The Poor Law of 1834 cancels a policy of governmental handouts to the poor, so they are forced into unhealthy and inhumane workhouses run by the state.

1980: The social consciousness of Great Britain has resulted in a substantially socialist government that subsidizes business and provides social services. However, the recent election of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister (1979) introduces an era of increased privatization of social services, thus returning England to a more capitalistic economy.

Today: Despite the movement away from socialism of the 1980s, Britain continues to offer comprehensive social services to the poor, although this system is being challenged by a tremendous influx of low-income immigrants seeking the safety of England's egalitarian political climate.

Early Nineteenth Century: Only boys from wealthy families can count on getting an advanced education that will open the door to economic independence. Women cannot obtain the education they need to achieve economic independence, for only a handful of schools cater to them, and even in those schools the curricula does not teach them what they need to learn to find practical careers. Women and young girls are educated in the home in the art of household management, and only occasionally in classic literature.

1980: After the feminist movement of the 1960s, the number of women nearly equals the number of men in universities, which had remained predominantly male despite the fact that women had achieved political equality after World War I and had been allowed to enter the universities to obtain an education equal to that available to men.

Today: Equitable public education is available for children of all socioeconomic groups. However, the growing number of non-English-speaking immigrants presents challenges to school systems to offer this group equal access to society through equal education.

Early Nineteenth Century: Illegitimate children are looked upon as bearing the sins of the parents who conceive them. Unwanted by society, these individuals are usually unable to extricate themselves from poverty and either enter a life of crime or of wandering from one place to another. The Yorkshire schools take advantage of parents of illegitimate children by offering an out-of-the-way location with "no vacations" to embarrass the parents as they attempt to get on with their lives.

1980: The stamp of illegitimacy no longer carries the stigma it did in the nineteenth century, and the number of unwanted children is diminishing, thanks to the birth control pill.

Today: A child's legitimacy is no longer an issue of social condemnation in most liberal, first world nations. However, fundamentalist groups in second and third world nations continue to punish offenders and their offspring.

What Do I Read Next?

The original Dickens novel, a meandering behemoth, follows the pattern of the picaresque tale and seems to be based on Tobias Smollett's picaresque novels, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) and *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), both of which Dickens read during his childhood. All of Dickens's novels discuss social reform of one kind or another, but two of them in particular consider the plight of poor children: *Hard Times* (1845) and *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839).

Like Dickens, David Edgar writes plays of social reform. Notable among his works are *Mary Barnes* (1977), about an unusual experimental psychiatric treatment of a schizophrenic woman, and *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* (1966), the story of a Jewish South African lawyer imprisoned for defending opponents of apartheid.

Further Study

Brockett, Oscar Gross, *Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama Since the Late Nineteenth Century,* Allyn and Bacon, 1991. This book provides a thematic overview of theatrical movements that have shaped modern theater.

Dickens, Charles, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby,* 1839, reprint, Oxford University Press, 1957.

This is the original Nicholas Nickleby novel by Dickens.

Edgar, David, ed., *Playwrights on Playwriting,* State of Play Series, Faber and Faber Limited, 1999.

This anthology of essays on playwriting contains an introduction by the volume editor, David Edgar.

Matthew, Colin, ed., *The Nineteenth Century: The British Isles: 1815-1901,* Oxford University Press, 2000.

This book of essays by leading historians covers the economy, politics, society, gender, religious, and artistic world of nineteenth-century Britain. Painter, Susan, *Edgar, The Playwright,* Methuen, 1996.

A study of Edgar's works, this book includes a chronology of his life and production dates as well as some photos.

Price, Martin, ed., *Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays,* Prentice-Hall, 1967.

This collection of essays, mostly focusing on one or another of Dickens's novels, includes an essay by Dickens Scholar Barbara Hardy entitled "Change of Heart in Dickens' Novels."

Rubin, Leon, *The Nicholas Nickleby Story: The Making of the Historic Royal Shakespeare Company Production,*

Heinemann, 1981. This book is a documentary of the first production of the play, including photos.

Swain, Elizabeth, *David Edgar, Playwright and Politician,* Peter Lang Publishing, 1986.

Swain examines the way in which, as she sees it, Edgar's political plays of the 1970s portray British history, post-World War II.

Tucker, Herbert, ed., *A Companion to Victorian Literature,* Polity Press, 1999.

The book is comprised of a collection of essays by recent Victorian scholars.

Williams, Raymond, *Culture and Society 1780-1851,* 1958, reprint, Columbia University Press, 1983.

This readable scholarly work on the literary and social history of industrialized Britain poses the hypothesis that culture became a commodity during this time.

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Levin, Bernard, "The Truth about Dickens in Nine Joyous Hours," in *Sunday Times* (London), July 8, 1980, p. 40.

Schlicke, Paul, "Nicholas Nickleby," in the *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens,* Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 404.

Swain, Elizabeth, *David Edgar: Playwright and Politician,*Peter Lang Publishing, 1986, pp. 65, 145, 221, 263, 268, 277, 330-31, 335, 336.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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