Allegory can never be judged by its novelty. To criticize Dickens for lack of originality in his perceptions and analogies is to divert attention from the very source of his power, of the power of any allegorist. What lives in his consciousness as his mode of experience is probably not too different from what lives subliminally in the consciousnesses of readers subject to the same cultural conditioning. It is this very universality of human experience in a given time and place that completes the process of communication of life entirely lived and felt. There would be no power in the image-making consciousness of the writer without responsiveness in kind from the reader. With it comes the imaginative power that characterizes the poet.

But what conclusions can be drawn concerning Dickens's allegorical writing as a totality? This study has sought to discover the "comprehensive and self-consistent mode of experience" that lies behind the created world of Dickens: his perceptual universe. Perceived by the reader directly through inference, descriptions of all kinds of experience have communicated appropriate emotional responses to him in the "kind of speculative thought which," as Murry says, "differs from the speculative thought of the philosopher by its working from particular to particular." Such thoughts, felt experience rather than didactic lessons, become a complex mosaic. Can the pieces be put together to form a "Dickens Weltanschauung"?

With much admitted sacrifice of complexity, the story of the tapestried imagination can readily be organized into logical discourse and can be retold as the allegory of a nineteenth-century
Everyman. This Everyman has a significantly contemporary look, quite unlike that of his otherworldly fifteenth-century counterpart. For Dickens's Everyman provides emotional responses to the same elements in contemporary life and thought for which Tennyson agonizingly sought answers. Given their different assumptions and attitudes, however, the problems and questions look quite different. The pragmatic Dickens, in and of this world, accepted without apparent anguish the discoveries of contemporary science, which brought man out of primitive beginnings and which threw doubts on his personal immortality. He was content to leave mystery as mystery, but he found in the new ideas imaginative materials with which to illuminate life here and now—to show that the real terror is death-in-life: not to be descended from primitive monsters, but to be and act like them. Even as he points out the death-related concepts, he likewise shows the way to escape from them and therefore also from death. If Tennyson comes laboriously to faith through honest doubt, Dickens spontaneously assumes an infectious faith in life itself. From life fully lived springs freedom, contentment, and hope. The future can then take care of itself. These views were perhaps more happily communicated to most Victorians, who shivered in the contemporary climate of opinion, than were the mental lucubrations of the more cerebral artists of the day. Indeed, they may speak even more readily to the twentieth century, which regards Tennyson as a little quaint.

In Dickens's view, Everyman comes out of and goes back into mystery. He emerges from the mists, travels steadily along the road or river in a series of changing figures he carries along with him, and in due time passes back into the mists. Awareness of this pattern makes him conscious of an intimate kinship with all the other shadowy human figures set along the same path from the beginning of time to its end. This is a pattern over which he has no control, but which he is doomed to trace out.

While he is on the road, however, he does have the power to make life joyous and vital, to invest it with meaning. To do so, he must find the wisdom to permit the natural processes of life, both for himself and for others whom he touches, the freedom to develop, mature, come to fruition, and decay. Attempts to force or to deny any part of the process lead to blight and death-in-life. In this natural order of development, Everyman must learn to reconcile the free and ideal world of dream with the circumscribed and imperfect world of fact, neither of which may be denied in the
fully alive human being. Along the way, Everyman will encounter
a host of eccentric and grotesque half-adults whose example he
must shun: dehumanized creatures who have egocentrically at-
ttempted to resolve the dualism without effort or pain by repudi-
ing one world or the other. On the one hand are those who have
rejected the world of fact to live undisturbed in a private inner
world of dreams—unnatural children and self-centered parasites
like Skimpole or Dedlock; frozen caricatures of people like Belinda
Pocket. On the other hand are those who insist upon the exclu-
siveness of the world of fact and deny the world of dream—cruel
tyrrants and ogres like Dombey and Gradgrind; ludicrously vicious
yet powerless dolls like Smallweed and his family; primitive mon-
sters without feelings or conscience like Rogue Riderhood. Along
the way he will also encounter a multitude of partial human be-
ings—subhuman savages, pathetic innocents, dolls and puppets
who have been unable to claim their human heritage because of de-
privation, exploitation, or their own limitations of strength and will.
These are adults manqué like Magwitch, Gaffer, Charley, Nancy, Jo,
and Dora.

In the natural process of human development, however, Every-
man first learns to wonder and to dream, for, as he will one day
perceive, the capacity to do so provides the “fireplace” of his soul.
He first formulates the ideal good as a selfish dream; its achieve-
ment is in personal terms of fulfilled happiness. First contact with
the “real” world comes by way of presentiment through the threat-
ening “Mask” and the images of guilt. Everyman comes to an intu-
itive understanding that what humanity calls evil is another term
for the circumscription and imperfection of human life: physical
limitations, pain, and death on the one hand; human limitation and
susceptibility to error on the other. With the knowledge of his per-
fected dreams upon him, he becomes increasingly aware of his own
complicity in imperfection and thus becomes ridden with feelings
of guilt, both as an individual and as a member of society. Every-
man must learn to live with this knowledge of evil; of boundaries,
of unfulfilled and compromised ideals. When he has fully assimili-
ated these limiting ideas, he is ready to take on the full adult life of
involvement and responsibility.

Now the ideal transmutes from the selfish and egocentric dream
to radiate outward toward the rest of humanity. The good life takes
on its real meaning as Everyman attempts to make the ideal a real-
ity for others. He finds his hopes and dreams perpetuated in the
coming generations, and for them will continue to raise castles in
the air to give life a joy and warmth possible only when he has relin-
quished his private dreams of personal fulfillment. As a naturally
maturing individual, he constantly readjusts his concept of time,
the most basic of all his concepts. Without time, life is inconceiv-
able. With time, as he will see, come creation, change, diversity, ac-
tion, and movement—but to have these, he must also accept dan-
ger, decay, and dissolution. To have life, he must acquiesce in
death. The present moment—a pinpoint in time—becomes less
and less crucial to him as the life in his memory stretches out longer
behind him, and as the life of hope and dream reaches out more
comprehensively into the future.

As a mature adult, Everyman may appear to have come about
full circle when he is ready to say, with Lizzie, that the “real” world
is the one that exists in the mind. Actually, he has moved miracu-
lessly forward for, as experience has brought the outside world of
fact within his consciousness to be synthesized into memory and
hope, he has not repudiated the outside world but has absorbed it.
Personal death for him has lost its threatening quality, and he sees
his life being perpetually revitalized in humanity’s ongoing life.
Whereas the egocentric being shrinks into a frozen or mechanical
imitation of human life, the being of Everyman has expanded to
assimilate the whole of humanity.

This, in these terms, is the total allegory—the ordered inter-
pretation of experience—contained in the configurations. Whether
or not Dickens “thought” about it when writing a story, it was there
as the framework and flesh of his mode of experience, it helped to
determine what he would see about him, and it colored every step
of the composition. The appropriate analogies and associations
rose selectively to the surface of his mind to appear as setting, char-
acters, plot, theme, and language—to provide what might be called
the substance of his style: that part of it that “is the man.”

Dickens gives frequent notice of his allegorical intent. From the
simple short pieces, such as “A Child’s Story” or “Nobody’s Story”
to the big complex novels, such as Bleak House and Little Dorrit, he
points the “finger of Allegory.” As he creates the characters, situa-
tions, and actions that fill his novels with bustling life and reality, he
understands full well that he is “reweaving” parts or all of the total
allegory of the pilgrimage of life. David Copperfield glancingly al-
ludes to this fact (see ch. VII) when he says he was “balanced curi-
ously” between “two irreconcilable conclusions”: “the one, that
what I felt was general and unavoidable; the other, that it was particular to me, and might have been different." What this statement seems to record is Dickens's reminder that he could have woven David's tale in such fashion that it would have turned out otherwise.

Nowhere else in his novels did Dickens so openly declare his allegorical purposes as in *Little Dorrit*. After the travellers in quarantine in Marseilles have been released to resume their individual journeys, the narrator notes that by nightfall

the caravan of the morning, all dispersed, went their appointed ways. And thus ever, by day and night, under the sun and under the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another, move all we restless travellers through the pilgrimage of life. (*LD*, bk. I, ch. 2)

Two unlikely characters are Dickens's further voices, one at the beginning and one at the end of the novel. Miss Wade is first. As the travellers part, she makes a "composed" statement: "In our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet us, from many strange places and by many strange roads . . . and what is set to us to do to them, and what is set to them to do to us, will all be done." (bk. I, ch. 2).

The summarizing statement at the end falls unexpectedly from the lips of Flora Finching. Like Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*, Flora is a repository of insight once one unravels her tangled language. She is speaking to Little Dorrit.

"I earnestly beg you as the dearest thing that ever was if you'll still excuse the familiarity from one who moves in very different circles to let Arthur understand that I don't know after all whether it wasn't all nonsense between us though pleasant at the time and trying too and certainly Mr. F did work a change and the spell being broken nothing could be expected to take place without weaving it afresh which various circumstances have combined to prevent of which perhaps not the least powerful was that it was not to be." (bk. II, ch. 34)

Flora, it seems, like her creator understands that how the tale is woven determines its outcome. She and Arthur, similarly suspended in childhood at the beginning of the novel, have suffered opposite fates. For him, given a second chance to live through the adolescent experience by "weaving it afresh," the story this time turns out differently. For her, "it was not to be." Similarly, Tattycoram, for whom the story of Miss Wade has been rewoven, finds within herself what is needed to change its ending.
In his last years, as the events in Dickens's life must have deepened his personal feelings of guilt and non-fulfillment and failure, there are certainly grounds for describing a darkened outlook in his final novels. Nonetheless, there is likewise evidence in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* that his faith in the *Weltanschauung* he had developed remained unshaken. He still could muster the perspective to see beyond his own diminished actual world to reaffirm the real significance of human dreams and values.

Edwin—not Jasper—becomes the vehicle for putting the dismal Cloisterham world into perspective. In this Cloisterham, the narrator has earlier observed: "Even its single pawnbroker takes in no pledges, nor has he for a long time, but offers vainly an unredeemed stock for sale, of which the costlier articles are dim and pale old watches apparently in a cold perspiration, tarnished sugar-tongs with ineffectual legs, and odd volumes of dismal books" (*MED*, ch. 3). The "pale old watches," the "ineffectual legs," and the "volumes of dismal books" are emblems of a nineteenth-century human community that for the time being has lost its way.

On a later occasion, after Rosa and Edwin have decided to go their separate ways, Edwin decides to return to Mr. Grewgious the "sorrowful jewels" he had planned to give Rosa as his fiancée. He explains his decision to Grewgious:

They were but a sign of broken joys and baseless projects; in their very beauty they were . . . almost a cruel satire on the loves, hopes, plans, of humanity, which are able to forecast nothing, and are so much brittle dust. Let them be. He would restore them to her guardian when he came down; he in his turn would restore them to the cabinet from which he had unwillingly taken them; and there, like old letters or old vows, or other records of old aspirations come to nothing, they would be disregarded, until, being valuable, they were sold into circulation again, to repeat their former round. (ch. 13)

The note struck here is a sad one because at the moment the human dream seems bankrupt, without value on the market. Despite the biographical evidence to suggest that Dickens's view at the end was a "dark" one, this idea might have appeared anywhere in Dickens. Its implications go beyond either the optimistic or the pessimistic: they may be viewed as predominantly either sad or happy depending on the current state of the dream; on which part of the total allegory one is exploring at the moment and how it is being woven. Yet whichever is predominant, the opposite possibility lingers in the background to communicate the bittersweet
interpretation of life. In the world about him, Dickens found an inexhaustible supply of variations on his allegory of life. The bustling specificity of his novels may sometimes obscure the universal representation; yet the universal, once seen, is thereafter clearly visible through the circumstantial.

Recognizing the unified mode of experience controlling and stabilizing the richly varied materials of life that burst from his novels leads finally to a new respect for the mind of Charles Dickens. His interpretation of life remains strikingly valid, unsentimental, and relevant a century and more after its inception. He shared with Shakespeare and Arnold’s Greeks one fundamental quality of spirit: the capacity to see life steadily and see it whole. Life is tragedy, but it is also comedy. If it is sad that human dreams and aspirations come to nothing, it is a joyous miracle that they can and will be sold into circulation again to repeat their former rounds. Again as in Shakespeare, the world of Dickens’s novels, though pervaded by mysterious forces over which humanity has little or no control, is the world of time, bustling with the things and activity of this life, and finding the meaning of life in the quality an individual brings to its living. The fact that dreams can be revitalized for every oncoming human being ensures that human life can continue to be existentially invested with the qualities necessary to give it significance.