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# **WORKING-CLASS LIFE IN CHARLES DICKENS' "NOBODY'S STORY"**

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# ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines Charles Dickens' "Nobody's Story" (1853) in relation to the economic conditions of its time. Starting from and focusing on the working-class life of the main character, this thesis explores how the story is shaped by the economic conditions of Victorian England, but at the same time responds to them, causing contradictions to arise in the text. The theoretical basis of this analysis constitutes of the materialist and dialectical framework of Marxism.

"Nobody's Story" tells the story of Nobody, a working-class man with a family, who is dependent on the wealthier Bigwig family. This thesis approaches "Nobody's Story" by analysing the description of the different aspects of Nobody's working-class life. In the course of the story, Nobody encounters and struggles with issues such as education, unsanitary living conditions, a spreading disease, art and leisure. The description of his life is examined in relation to the developments of the capitalist mode of production at the time.

The results of this thesis show that the story's criticism of social issues stays within the ideological limits of the liberal petty bourgeoisie. To some extent, the story grasps the social problems of its time and speaks for the rights of the poor, but it is unable to connect these problems to the economic conditions that give rise to them, and it does not go beyond reconciliation and reform as the solution. The story adopts an essentially bourgeois stance that serves to naturalise and perpetuate the bourgeois society and its problems that are the story's very object of criticism. The analysis thus proves the importance and relevance of a critical examination of texts and authors, such as Dickens, that have a reputation of being socially conscious.

Keywords: Victorian literature, short story, Charles Dickens, Marxist criticism, dialectical materialism

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# TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tässä opinnäytteessä tarkastellaan Charles Dickensin novellia "Nobody's Story" (1853) suhteessa 1800-luvun taloudellisiin olosuhteisiin. Opinnäytteessä tutkitaan, miten novellin julkaisun aikaiset taloudelliset olosuhteet vaikuttavat novellin rakentumiseen, miten novelli reagoi niihin, ja millaisia ristiriitaisuuksia tekstissä ilmenee tämän vastavuoroisen prosessin seurauksena. Tarkastelun lähtökohdan muodostaa päähenkilön työväenluokkainen elämä. Analyysin teoreettisen pohjan muodostaa marxilaisen teorian materialistinen ja dialektinen viitekehys.

"Nobody's Story" kertoo tarinan Nobodystä, perheellisestä työväenluokkaisesta miehestä, joka on riippuvainen varakkaammasta Bigwigin perheestä. Opinnäytteen tutkimuskysymystä lähestytään analysoimalla Nobodyn työväenluokkaisen elämän eri osa-alueiden kuvausta. Tarinan edetessä Nobody kohtaa koulutukseen, epähygieenisiin asuinoloihin, leviävään tautiin, taiteeseen ja vapaa-aikaan liittyviä kysymyksiä ja kamppailee niiden kanssa. Nobodyn elämän kuvausta tarkastellaan suhteessa kapitalistisen tuotantotavan kehitykseen 1800-luvulla.

Tämän opinnäytteen tulokset osoittavat, että novellin yhteiskunnallinen kritiikki pysyy liberaalin pikkuporvariston ideologisissa rajoissa. "Nobody's Story" pyrkii parantamaan työväen oloja, mutta päättyy omaksumaan pohjimmiltaan porvarillisen asenteen. Täten se normalisoi ja jatkaa sitä porvarillista yhteiskuntaa ja niitä ongelmia, jotka ovat novellin kritiikin kohteena. Novelli ymmärtää jossain määrin aikansa ongelmia, mutta ei pysty yhdistämään niitä taloudellisiin olosuhteisiin, joista ne johtuvat. Vaikka novelli kiinnittääkin huomiota yhteiskunnallisiin ongelmiin ja puhuu vähävaraisten oikeuksien puolesta, se jää ratkaisussaan sovinnon ja reformin tasolle. Opinnäytteen tulokset osoittavat, miten tärkeää ja relevanttia on tarkastella kriittisesti sellaisia tekstejä ja kirjailijoita, kuten Charles Dickens, joita pidetään yhteiskunnallisesti kriittisinä.

Avainsanat: viktoriaaninen kirjallisuus, novelli, Charles Dickens, marxilainen kirjallisuudentutkimus, dialektinen materialismi

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## Abbreviations and Remarks

Due to the presence of more than one work from one author, and for the sake of brevity, the following abbreviations are used to refer to the following works:

Eagleton, Terry

*Criticism and Ideology: A Study  
in Marxist Literary Theory* CI

*Marxism and Literary Criticism* MLC

Engels, Friedrich

“On Historical Materialism” “OHM”

*Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* SUS

Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels

*On Literature and Art: A Selection  
of Writings* OLA

Please note that *On Literature and Art* is a collection of texts chosen by the editors. Not all texts in the collection are presented in full length.

Please see “Works Cited” for further information on the works used.

# 1 Introduction

In the preface to *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Terry Eagleton says the following: “I make little claim to originality or comprehensiveness, but I have tried at least to be neither tedious nor mystifying” (vi). Certainly, the same can be said when setting out to analyse a writer like Charles Dickens, as one might find it challenging to be original due to the comprehensiveness of previous criticism. In addition to novels, Dickens produced various forms of writing, such as short fiction. One of the areas of Dickens’ short fiction constitutes of Christmas pieces. Yet, despite having written Christmas pieces for nearly 20 years, these writings appear to have been scarcely explored in criticism (Thomas 62). “Nobody’s Story” (1853) belongs to this group of writing. Although Thomas dismisses “Nobody’s Story” as a clumsy effort “to use the occasion of the Christmas season to evoke a sense of fellow feeling” (82), what happens in “Nobody’s Story” is far larger than just that. Starting from and focusing on the description of the working-class life of the main character – mysteriously nameless, a “Nobody” – this thesis analyses how “Nobody’s Story” is shaped by the economic base of its time and responds to it, and the conflicts that arise in the text because of this dialectic interaction.

Thomas refers to two important focuses of Dickens’ short stories as “imaginative escapism” and the creation of “fellow feeling”<sup>1</sup> (133). Along similar lines, Buckland associates the hearth in Dickens’ writing with an imaginative ability to “transcend material circumstances” (30) and notices that “[...] Dickens represented the fire as emblematic of shared experience [...]” (3). Both characteristics are certainly present within “Nobody’s Story.” The story – although it is more of a description than a narrative with a clear plot – features a hard-working but meek main character whose life the reader glimpses through the agency of a third-person narrator. Nobody is a working man with a wife and children, and he is dependent on the richer Bigwig family, who oversee “him and his affairs” (121). This relationship is, however, dysfunctional, as the Bigwig family are not able to

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<sup>1</sup> On these ideas Thomas quotes David Sonstroem on page 28: “As David Sonstroem has observed in his analysis of the significance of the elusive term ‘fancy’ in the context of *Hard Times*: ‘Two areas of meaning emerge. . . . The one is imaginative play: mental play unhindered by the strictures of reality. The other is fellow feeling: compassion, sentiment.’”

accomplish their task, since they repeatedly end up quarrelling between themselves. Consequently, Nobody is more often neglected than not. When a disease strikes the population, Nobody loses “those who were dearest to him” (123). This experience seemingly marks a turning point for him: he rejects the prayers of a preacher, stands up to his Master after the latter blames the workers for the disease, fails to incite any real change in the conditions of the workers, and, in the end, dies.

The events of the story, along with the kind and honest character of Nobody, succeed in evoking sympathy for the main character and drawing attention to social problems that surround his life. There is no doubt that Dickens has a reputation as a socially critical writer: Andrews even suggests that “[...] Dickens deserves to be titled an honorary ‘social worker’ for his tireless promotion of compassionate social norms with regard to the poor and oppressed [...]” (297). Yet, to understand the extent of Dickens’ social criticism, it is not enough to focus on the aforementioned fellow feeling evoked in the texts as such. This thesis approaches “Nobody’s Story” from a dialectical and materialist framework. As Marx says in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), “The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general” and that “[w]ith the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed” (qtd in *OLA* 85). This takes us to the “materialist conception of history” according to which “the production of the means to support human life—and, next to production, the exchange of things produced—is the basis of all social structure [...]” (Engels, *SUS* 131). According to materialism, art cannot as such alter historical reality, but it can actively participate in the effort to do so (Eagleton, *MLC* 10).

In Marxist terminology, “the economic foundation” and “the social, political and intellectual life process in general” quoted above are respectively known as base and superstructure (see Eagleton *MLC* 5). As Engels points out in a letter to Franz Mehring in 1893, base and superstructure affect each other as “once a historic element has been brought into the world by other, ultimately economic causes, it reacts, can react on its environment and even on the causes that have

given rise to it” (qtd in *OLA* 101). The materialism of Marx and Engels is dialectical, an important point which sometimes gets overridden by what Eagleton refers to in literary criticism as “vulgar Marxist’ criticism” (*MLC* 17). In terms of literature, dialectical materialism means that, as literature is an element of the superstructure (Eagleton, *MLC* 9), analysing it as separate from its base will inevitably give a partial understanding of the text (see Eagleton, *MLC* 6-7).

The theoretical framework thus primarily builds on the thoughts of Marx and Engels. Further theoretical elaboration builds mainly on the work of Terry Eagleton. The choice of theoretical framework is not solely based on the dialectical and materialist viewpoint of Marxism, although it allows a flexible and multifaceted framework in analysing and understanding a literary work. It is also based on temporal relevance: the writing and publication of “Nobody’s Story” in the mid-1800s, and Dickens’ position as a Victorian writer, coincide with the development of both capitalism and the Marxist philosophy.

As Engels says in a draft of his letter to Margaret Harkness in 1888: “You felt you could afford to tell an old story, because you could make it a new one by simply telling it truly” (qtd in *OLA* 115). This is the main attempt of this thesis. It is also where the value of the dialectical and materialist viewpoint of Marxism lies. Despite its criticism of social issues, “Nobody’s Story” adopts a bourgeois stance from a liberal petty bourgeois standpoint, which serves to perpetuate the bourgeois society and its problems that are the story’s very object of criticism. It speaks for the rights of the poor, but only within this framework; it reacts to the elements on which it builds, but only within this framework. It is a text that aspires to improve the conditions of working people but arrives at a stance that naturalises the structures of oppression.



## 2 “Nobody’s Story”

### 2.1 Nobody and the Bigwigs

“Nobody’s Story” was originally published in 1853 in a Christmas number of *Household Words* as part of a collection of stories titled *Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire* (Thomas 144). It is the last story in this collection of “disparate stories connected only by the pretence of being narrated before a Christmas fire” (Thomas 144). Perhaps the most prominent feature of “Nobody’s Story” is the absence of information. The reader is not given any specific knowledge of time, place, work or name, except for the name of a wealthy family called the Bigwig family. Yet, the story reveals enough for the reader to be able to deduce further information about Nobody: “He lived in a busy place, and he worked very hard to live” (121). He has lived his life in “close and tainted houses” breathing “murky, [...] sickening air” (123), recalling the “horribly crowded, unsanitary housing” of the workers in the slums of industrial cities (Ford and Christ 894). Furthermore, “He was one of an immense family, all of whose sons and daughters gained their daily bread by daily work, prolonged from their rising up betimes until their lying down at night” (121). It seems reasonable to assume that Nobody lives in a city and leads a working-class life. The latter interpretation is further supported by his Master at work calling the workers “O you laboring men!” (123). This means that Nobody works with other people, as is characteristic of many wage workers under capitalism (see Engels, *SUS* p. 134-36).

The most revealing description of Nobody, however, is the following: “He had no hope of ever being rich enough to live a month without hard work, but he was quite content, God knows, to labor with a cheerful will” (121). This description adheres to what Marx calls in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* “the science of *asceticism*” whose “true ideal is the *ascetic* but *extortionate* miser and the *ascetic* but *productive* slave.” Its principles lie in “[s]elf-denial, the denial of life and of all human needs [...]. The less you eat, drink and read books; the less you go to theatre, the dance hall, the public-house [...] the more you *save*—the *greater* becomes [...] your *capital*.” In

short, “The less you *are*, the more you *have*; the less you express your own life, the greater is your *alienated* life [...]” (qtd in *OLA* 62-63). Nobody seems to be the epitome of the hard worker who is submissive yet cheery and complies with his duty without a complaint: “Beyond this destiny he had no prospect, and he sought none” (121). Yet, Dickens was not an advocate of ascetic life (Gurney 230), and the story does paint a disturbing image, as Nobody’s utter compliance seems to rob him of a human mind capable of thinking for himself, along with his human wants and needs.

Nobody’s lack of prospect asserts itself in his relationship to the Bigwig family as well. The Bigwigs are “composed of all the stateliest people thereabouts” and they “had undertaken to save him the trouble of thinking for himself, and to manage him and his affairs” (121). As can be expected, Nobody’s relationship to this family is characterised by submission and servitude: “‘Why truly,’ said he, ‘I have little time upon my hands; and if you will be so good as to take care of me, in return for the money I pay over’—for the Bigwig family were not above his money—‘I shall be relieved and much obliged, considering that you know best’” (121). Nobody accepts their management on the grounds that he has no time for the management of his own affairs. He also pays for their services, which seems unreasonable thinking how much, according to the narrator, he has to work and how little he still has. Instead of demanding better working conditions, which would enable him the resources to look after his own affairs, he positions himself mindlessly and completely at the mercy and will of other people, who he deems better than himself.

At this point, it is worth examining the economic base on which the text, as part of the superstructure, builds. The publication of “Nobody’s Story” and the career of Dickens himself coincide with the development of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>2</sup> Engels talks about the British industrial revolution which caused a shift of power in the economy: “The wealth of the bourgeoisie increased considerably faster than that of the landed aristocracy. Within the bourgeoisie itself the

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<sup>2</sup> See Eagleton, *CI* p. 130 on Dickens’ fiction: “The anarchic, decentred, fragmentary forms of the early novels correspond in general to an earlier, less organised phase of industrial capitalism; the unified structures of the mature fiction allude to a more intensively coordinated capitalism [...]”

financial aristocracy, the bankers, etc., were more and more pushed into the background by the manufacturers” (“OHM” 101). The “rapid and unregulated industrialization” allowed England to accumulate extensive wealth and expand its markets worldwide (Ford and Christ 891). In the superstructure, this development gave rise to what Hadley calls “an emergent utilitarian and liberal ideology” (69). The trade profits England obtained resulted in “extensive capital investments in all continents,” and by the year 1890 England’s colonies “comprised more than a quarter of all the territory on the surface of the earth” (Ford and Christ 891-92).

England’s development into “the world’s workshop” and London’s into “the world’s banker” (Ford and Christ 892) was not without problems. “In the early 1840s” there was “a severe depression, with widespread unemployment [...],” and in general, the workers’ conditions of both living and working were appalling (Ford and Christ 894). The living conditions in “Nobody’s Story” are not any better: the houses are densely built and dirty, and the air is polluted even without the disease, which the narrator vividly describes as “[n]ew poison” (123). These problems are inscribed into the capitalist mode of production and exchange itself. Capitalism results in the means of production being accumulated in the private possession of the capitalists while the workers are left with “nothing but their labour power” (Engels, *SUS* 136). It results in masses of unemployment, which allow for the lowering of wages for the profit of capital, and in the recurrence of depression due to the conflict between “the extension of production” and “[t]he expansion of the markets” (Engels, *SUS* 139-40). The bourgeoisie itself benefits from extracting “as much [...] work out of” the workers as possible (Engels, “OHM” 98). In these conditions, then, a submissive attitude needs to be instilled into the working people to uphold the social order: the bourgeoisie “had a common interest in keeping in subjection the great working mass of the nation. The merchant or the manufacturer himself stood in the position of master, or, as it was until lately called, of ‘natural superior’ [...]” (Engels, “OHM” 98). In other words, making the existing order seem natural and fixed could be used to prevent attempts to resist it.

This economic structure forms the basis of the economic and social positioning present in “Nobody’s Story.” Dependent and humble, Nobody becomes an embodiment of the type of worker that would benefit capitalist society most. As Engels notes, “the British workman, some fifteen years ago, was the model workman [...]”<sup>3</sup> with a “respectful regard for the position of his master, and [...] self-restraining modesty in claiming rights for himself [...]” (“OHM” 105-06). Nobody’s meek character, that “labor[s] with a cheerful will” and “shall be relieved and much obliged” to the Bigwig family for their management (121), conforms to this image. Meanwhile, the toil and troubles of his family seem to fade in his eyes: “The hands of his wife were hardened with toil, and she was old before her time; but she was dear to him. His children, stunted in their growth, bore traces of unwholesome nurture; but they had beauty in his sight” (122). The unconditional love Nobody nurtures for his family certainly evokes sympathy. At the same time, his “cheerful” attitude seems to ignore the reality and the visible traces of hardships in front of him.

## 2.2 Material Reality and Feelings of Displacement

In terms of literary devices, the fireside acts as a focal point of Nobody’s ability to surpass this harsh reality, echoing Buckland’s argument about the hearth’s role in Dickens’ work. The fire symbolises “domestic virtue” and “innate moral goodness,” which it links to imaginative abilities that allow the characters to go beyond their material reality (Buckland 7, 30). In “Nobody’s Story,” the fireside is where Nobody goes to escape his worries: when he broods over the meaning of the artwork set up by the Bigwigs, “he went home, and sat down by his fireside to get it out of his mind” (121). The narrator then states that “his fireside was a bare one, all hemmed in by blackened streets; but it was a precious place to him” (122) before advancing to the description of his wife and children. Of course, it is reasonable to assume that Nobody views his wife and children as he does simply because he loves them. But one could still argue, in view of Buckland’s results, that the fireside does provide a starting

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<sup>3</sup> According to the editor’s note on page 88, “On Historical Materialism” formed “the principal part of the Introduction to the English edition of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, published in 1892.”

point for reality to fade before the kindness and good nature of the character; and Nobody's "nature [is] kind" (122).

Similar to what Buckland states about Lizzie in *Our Mutual Friend*, by providing "an imaginative escape," Nobody's grim fireplace "reconciles" him "to continue this static, submissive life" (28). There are ideological implications in such a representation of the fireplace. Instead of a material change in the living conditions, the fireplace offers a temporary escape which, by momentarily easing the toil, only prolongs the existence of the prevailing circumstances. This does not mean that the fireplace cannot also be an anchor to reality, as in the case of the education of Nobody's children. Nobody may be poor, but he understands the value of an education:

Above all other things, it was an earnest desire of this man's soul that his children should be taught. "If I am sometimes misled," said he, "for want of knowledge, at least let them know better, and avoid my mistakes. If it is hard to me to reap the harvest of pleasure and instruction that is stored in books, let it be easier to them." (122)

But when he cannot secure his children education, the fireplace is where he sits and notices the consequences:

Meanwhile, this man, in his short evening snatches at his fireside, saw the demon Ignorance arise there, and take his children to itself. He saw his daughter perverted into a heavy slatternly drudge; he saw his son go moping down the ways of low sensuality, to brutality and crime; he saw the dawning light of intelligence in the eyes of his babies so changing into cunning and suspicion, that he could have rather wished them idiots. (122)

The fireplace loses its ability to offer an escape. It becomes what Buckland concludes about "Dickens's hearth," that is, "a space in which many of his most central concerns would sit in unequal, and unresolved, tension" (30). No matter how much Nobody manages to ignore his and his family's reality, he cannot do so infinitely; he is forced to confront the material conditions of his life and their consequences.

Even such a minor image as the fireplace cannot maintain a one-sided, simple meaning, nor can it stay ideologically neutral. Contradictory depictions are closely connected to the social position of Dickens. As Eagleton says, “The major fiction of Victorian society was the product of the petty bourgeoisie” that “was [...] able to find epitomised in its own condition some of the most typical contradictions of bourgeois society as a whole” (*CI* 125). In their class position, the petty-bourgeois writers could access both the dominant class’s and the dominated class’s ideological elements (Eagleton, *CI* 126). Yet, in general, the Victorians’ reaction to the developments of their era was conflictual: although the industrial and political advancements produced contentment, the fast development of technology also evoked feelings of displacement and loss (Ford and Christ 892).

These feelings of displacement can be traced to the developments in the economic structure. As production became concentrated, it also became more socialised (Engels, *SUS* 134). Yet, “the products now produced socially were not appropriated by those who had actually set in motion the means of production and actually produced the commodities, but by the *capitalists*” (Engels, *SUS* 134-35). In other words, production aims at the profit of the capitalist. The technological advancements meant that human labour was no longer needed in the same scale as before, leading first to “the displacement of millions of manual by a few machine workers” and then to “the displacement of more and more of the machine workers themselves” (Engels, *SUS* 139). This material reality blatantly contradicts the liberal ideology of capitalism that Hadley outlines: “From its very beginnings in Locke, liberalism built its fundamental logics on the individual, who only secondarily, if necessarily, enters a social domain after *attaining self-ownership through labor*” (73, italics added). Furthermore, by the development of statistics, on which “liberal ideology relied a great deal,” society became “its own autonomous entity, [...] a wholly different thing from the people who had been counted to make its sum” (Hadley 73, 70). Society became separate from the individuals that form it. It is no wonder, then, that feelings of displacement arose.

### 2.3 The Bigwigs, Bureaucracy and the Struggles of the Bourgeoisie

In view of these circumstances, the contradictions in “Nobody’s Story” can be examined. Perhaps the most pervasive irony in the story resides in the depiction of the Bigwig family. They are generally represented as respectable people who seem to generously help the poor, but the Bigwig family’s exaggerated behaviour and greed for money produce a satirising tone. According to the narrator, the Bigwigs are “composed of all the stateliest people thereabouts,” but they are also “all the noisiest” (121): “There was over-much drumming, trumpeting, and speech-making, in the neighborhood where he [Nobody] dwelt; but he had nothing to do with that. Such clash and uproar came from the Bigwig family [...]” (121). The Bigwigs agree to take care of Nobody’s affairs, but in exchange for money, “for the Bigwig family were not above his money” (121). The sense of mockery is extended by the quite explicit description of their artwork as uncultivated and unappealing, especially since Nobody agrees to their management under the supposition that they “know best” (121): “They set up the strangest statues, in iron, marble, bronze, and brass, before his door; and darkened his house with the legs and tails of uncouth images of horses” (121). These “ugly images of horses [...] he was expected to fall down and worship” (121). That Nobody is supposed to “fall down and worship” the art highlights the discrepancy between what is expected of the artwork and the words used to describe it. Moreover, in an era of technical and scientific progress (Ford and Christ 891), the suggestion that they want to “save” someone “the trouble of thinking for himself” (121) gains an added tone of irony.

The confidence in the Bigwigs’ skills and taste further weakens in a scene regarding the education of Nobody’s children. In his “earnest desire” (122) to educate his children, Nobody goes to the Bigwig family to ask for help in the matter. He is, however, confronted with their utter inability to reach a decision.

But, the Bigwig family broke out into violent family quarrels concerning what it was lawful to teach to this man’s children. Some of the family insisted on such a thing being primary and indispensable above all other things; and others of the family insisted on such another thing

being primary and indispensable above all other things; and the Bigwig family, rent into factions, wrote pamphlets, held convocations, delivered charges, orations, and all varieties of discourses; impounded one another in courts Lay and courts Ecclesiastical; threw dirt, exchanged pummelings, and fell together by the ears in unintelligible animosity. (122)

While the Bigwigs argue, Nobody sees the concrete consequences of their incompetence in his children, but the Bigwigs are not implied to be aware of these effects of their actions. In fact, Nobody takes the blame: “Nay, by the clouded Heaven above me, I protest against this as my wrong!” (122). The mindset of bourgeois individualism appears here, as Nobody himself assumes individual responsibility for the state of his children caused by lack of education, and, as is implied later, also by lack of leisure and activities besides work. In other words, societal problems are blamed on the individual. This echoes what Hadley comments on a piece written by Joseph Brodsky: “Brodsky’s assertion serves as evidence for how the free man of a liberal society expects to be held accountable, since his intentions and his actions are his own” (73). But, one might ask, how could Nobody have done better? He has no education, no wealth, and his free time consists mostly of “short evening snatches at his fireside” (122). In these circumstances, Nobody’s “intentions” and “actions” are *not* “his own,” but rather the Bigwigs’, and the idea that Nobody is to blame seems ironic.

The passage about the Bigwigs’ quarrels over education can be seen to have wider implications than the isolated incompetence of one bourgeois family in relation to one working-class family. The rendering of the Bigwigs’ actions resembles a description of the workings of governmental institutions. The Bigwigs are “rent into factions,” and they “wrote pamphlets” and “impounded one another in courts Lay and courts Ecclesiastical” (122). The “stately” people have a “stately” way of operating; the Bigwigs are almost a microversion of bourgeois society. The critique of the Bigwigs’ course of action thus translates into a critique of bourgeois institutions and their slow bureaucratic processes. Indeed, Dickens himself doubted the functionality of bureaucratic, legislative and governmental practices (Hadley 67, 74). In general, “Liberals have always troubled over the



relation between the ‘machinery’ that sought to change ‘society’ [...] or some other aggregative entity and the soul of the individual whose isolated journey to freedom, judgment, and accountability seemed a different story” (Hadley, 74). In the story, amid the bureaucratic decision-making and political contention, real people’s lives are impacted.

These bureaucratic institutions mark the development of what Eagleton calls “increasing corporatism from the mid-century onwards” that takes the shape of, among other things, “an increasingly centralised state bureaucracy in such spheres as education and public health” (*CI* 110n26). Even with its problems, the mid-Victorian period has been characterised as “a time of prosperity” during which “its institutions worked well” in general (Ford and Christ 895). The British bourgeoisie was indeed able to consolidate its own position in society first through the Reform Act, which “gave to the bourgeoisie a recognised and powerful place in Parliament,” and later through the repeal of the Corn Laws, which marked its decisive dominance over the landed aristocracy (Engels, “OHM” 102). In other words, the Reform Act in 1832 and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 meant, respectively, a “response to the demands of the middle classes, who were gradually taking control of England’s economy [...]” and the beginnings of “a system of Free Trade” (Ford and Christ 893, 895).

Still, the British bourgeoisie was not as strong as it appeared. For a long time, it shared its ruling power with the aristocracy (Engels, “OHM” 97-101). Though the aristocracy had comprehended “that its own economic prosperity was irretrievably bound up with that of the industrial and commercial middle class,” by the 1830s the bourgeoisie had gained significant economic strength in relation to the aristocracy, and had to free itself politically of their resistance (Engels, “OHM” 98, 101). But even after the legal acts of 1832 and 1846, the aristocracy had “almost exclusive possession of all the leading government offices” (Engels, “OHM” 103-05). In what Eagleton refers to as the “complex conjuncture of bourgeois and aristocratic classes within the dominant bloc” (*CI* 102), the bourgeoisie “were, as a rule, quite uneducated upstarts [...]” and they

struggled with “a sense of their social inferiority” (Engels, “OHM” 104-05). These circumstances, then, limited the bourgeoisie’s ability and confidence to rule.

## 2.4 The Disease

The lack of education that Engels notices plays neatly into the deriding tone in which the Bigwigs’ artwork is described. Yet, there arises the question of whether “Nobody’s Story” satirises the bourgeoisie itself, as a class, or only derides their lack of confidence and their inability to rule as they ought. The latter interpretation seems to be supported by the responses to the spreading disease, “a pestilence” that “appeared among the laborers, and was slaying them by thousands” (122): “The dying and the dead were mingled in the close and tainted houses among which his [Nobody’s] life was passed. New poison was distilled into the always murky, always sickening air. The robust and the weak, old age and infancy, the father and the mother, all were stricken down alike” (123). The passage describes the scene vividly with expressions such as “mingled,” “murky” and “poison,” and reading it produces almost physical discomfort. Furthermore, the alliteration in “[t]he dying and the dead,” the repetition in “always murky, always sickening,” and the parallel structures in “[t]he robust and the weak, old age and infancy, the father and the mother” act as literary devices which help produce a vivid image.

Yet, the disease has a democratising effect, as “all were stricken down alike.” Even Nobody’s Master “had suffered heavily. His young wife [...] was dead; so, too, his only child” (123). Ideologically, the disease resembles Eagleton’s comment on the wind in Raymond Williams’ novel: “The wind knows no frontiers: its movement is that of a unity, gathering the novel’s disparate, mutually divided locales into a single landscape. It is on this note that the novel ends: on the *essential* oneness of what it has shown to be a fissured, fractured society” (CI 30). Williams “insist[s] on the *artifice* of divisions [...],” and in his view, as Eagleton notes more generally, the material realities of life can be eliminated by way of a change in viewpoint (CI 29). In “Nobody’s Story,” the main character’s socioeconomic reality pushes faintly through: “What means of flight had he? He remained

there, where he was, and saw those who were dearest to him die” (123). The disease does not discriminate, but it is significantly harder to evade if you are poor.

Nobody’s Master also acknowledges this simple fact, albeit a little differently, when he, after thanking Nobody for his kind effort to comfort him, says, “O you laboring men! The calamity began among you. If you had but lived more healthily and decently, I should not be the widowed and bereft mourner that I am this day” (123). Bourgeois individualism and liberalism shift the responsibility on the individuals and refuse to acknowledge the bourgeoisie’s own share in the “calamity.” The same attitude prevailed among the real bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century as well: “The owners of mines and factories regarded themselves as innocent of blame for such [living and working] conditions, for they were wedded to an economic theory of laissez-faire, which assumed that unregulated working conditions would ultimately benefit everyone” (Ford and Christ 894). But here, Nobody responds to his Master’s accusations:

“I have begun to understand a little that most calamities will come from us, as this one did, and that none will stop at our poor doors, until we are united with that great squabbling family yonder, to do the things that are right. We cannot live healthily and decently, unless they who undertook to manage us provide the means. We cannot be instructed unless they will teach us; we cannot be rationally amused, unless they will amuse us; we cannot but have some false gods of our own, while they set up so many of theirs in all the public places. The evil consequences of imperfect instruction, [...] pernicious neglect, [...] unnatural restraint and the denial of humanizing enjoyments, will all come from us, and none of them will stop with us. They will spread far and wide. They always do; they always have done—just like the pestilence. I understand so much, I think, at last.” (123)

This reconciliatory passage<sup>4</sup> takes us back to the point about the story criticising not the British bourgeoisie as such, but rather their inability to step up and accomplish their historic task. Here, the latter is what Nobody pleads for: to be “united with that great squabbling family yonder.” For Dickens, the “gulf between the rich and the poor” would be resolved by “mutual understanding and sympathy between the classes” (Slater 507-08). The Bigwigs, despite their incompetence, do not stop being “great.” They are only implored to fulfil their duty and “do the things that are right.”

It is almost as if Nobody had no class-consciousness. His psychological state resembles what Eagleton says about childhood innocence in Dickens’ novels: “Dickens’s fiction [...] reveals a contradiction between the social reality mediated by childhood innocence, and the transcendental moral values which that innocence embodies” (CI 128). The passive child becomes both the focal point of “the social forces which dominate him [...]” and the embodiment of “untaintable goodness” that transcends the real world and these forces (CI 128). Like the child, Nobody’s meek, innocent and passive character draws special attention to the social conditions under which he lives. This meekness and innocence then translates into goodness which helps him endure these conditions. Eagleton sees the symbol of childhood innocence as characteristic of “Dickens’s Romantic humanism,” whose “spontaneous, empiricist character” – “a significant aesthetic and ideological weakness,” considering the “urban rather than rural petty bourgeois” position of Dickens – he associates with the “‘Christmas spirit’ and the vulgar vitalism of *Hard Times*” (CI 128, 127). This association echoes what Thomas writes: “temporary escapism” along with “fellow feeling” were to Dickens the essence of his seasonal writing (36).

More importantly, the contradiction in the symbolism of childhood innocence demonstrates “the theoretical limitations of Dickens’s moralistic critique of bourgeois society” and is “intrinsic to petty-bourgeois consciousness, which needs to embrace conventional bourgeois ethics

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<sup>4</sup> Note again Engels’ words on “the model [British] workman” and his “self-restraining modesty in claiming rights for himself” (“OHM” 106).

in an undermining awareness of the harsh social realities they suppress” (*CI* 128). In Nobody’s response to his Master, every claim is conditioned with “unless they will teach us,” “unless they will amuse us” and so on (123). It is *their* education, *their* amusement, *their* religion and *their* morality which prevail. The Bigwigs quarrel between themselves about what Nobody’s children should or should not be taught, because it is to be *their* decision. Only, they are not able to arrive at one: “Even now the endless newspaper debates about middle-class education show that the English middle class does not yet consider itself good enough for the best education, and looks to something more modest” (Engels, “OHM” 104). In addition to the ideological content of education, this undecidedness indicates the aforementioned general insecurity among the bourgeoisie.

## 2.5 The Artwork, Progress and Change

Nobody expresses his lack of education, or “want of knowledge” (122), by repeating the phrase “I don’t understand.” In the face of all “the drumming, trumpeting, and speech-making, and the ugly images of horses,” Nobody expresses his bewilderment: “‘I don’t understand all this,’ said he, rubbing his furrowed brow confusedly. ‘But it *has* a meaning, maybe, if I could find it out’” (121). The Bigwigs, indeed determined to save Nobody the trouble of thinking, tell him what it means: “‘It means,’ returned the Bigwig family, suspecting something of what he said, ‘honor and glory in the highest, to the highest merit’” (121). Nobody accepts the answer and is “glad to hear that” (121).

Yet, looking at the artwork, the meaning is lost again – a passage that indicates a commentary on the state of contemporary art, or perhaps even what Hadley notes: Dickens’ doubt about “the reformist capacity of his own forms of public address” (67). What certainly emerges, however, is the consciousness of the progressive nature of capitalism in relation to feudalism, and, to a certain extent, the class content of that progress.

But, when he looked among the images in iron, marble, bronze, and brass, he failed to find a rather meritorious countryman of his, once the son of a Warwickshire wool-dealer, or any single

countryman whomsoever of that kind. He could find none of the men whose knowledge had rescued him and his children from terrific and disfiguring disease, whose boldness had raised his forefathers from the condition of serfs, whose wise fancy had opened a new and high existence to the humblest, whose skill had filled the workingman's world with accumulated wonders. Whereas, he did find others whom he knew no good of, and even others whom he knew much ill of.

“Humph!” said he. “I don't quite understand it.” (121)

The advance of capitalism meant the end of feudalism and serfdom (Engels, *SUS* 131-32). Nobody acknowledges this transition from serfdom to “the workingman's world,” which is somewhat ironically characterised as “filled [...] with accumulated wonders.” He also acknowledges the fast rate of advancement accompanying capitalism, although he struggles to fully comprehend it: “Such clash and uproar came from the Bigwig family, at the unaccountable proceedings of which race, he marveled much” (121). Indeed, “the productive forces evolved under the guidance of the bourgeoisie developed with a rapidity and in a degree unheard of before” (Engels, *SUS* 132), and Dickens himself was a firm believer in the advantages of “the spread of material things made possible by free trade capitalism” (Gurney 230). This belief appears in Nobody's apprehension of the progressive nature of capitalism as opposed to feudalism, and in the irony of “accumulated wonders” which supposedly pervade “the workingman's world.”

The limits of this apprehension appear in the assigning of capitalist advancement of society to the “boldness,” “wise fancy” and “skill” of men. Nobody's consciousness follows the “idealistic outlook” that Engels elaborates in *The Part Played by Labor in the Transition From Ape to Man* from 1876: “All merit for the swift advance of civilization was ascribed to the mind, to the development and activity of the brain” (qtd in *OLA* 56). Similarly, Marx says in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* from 1852 that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under

circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (qtd in *OLA* 97). Nevertheless, the text pushes some disillusionment. Like Eagleton, Gurney also notes “[t]he development of corporate capitalism from mid-century” which enforced the position of capitalists in the social structure (241). The conflict between the initially progressive and then corporatist character of capitalism takes the form of perplexity in the contemplation of the artwork: Nobody cannot find in the art the “meritorious” men he knows, so he does not understand.

Another perplexity appears in the very first lines of the story:

HE LIVED ON the bank of a mighty river, broad and deep, which was always silently rolling on to a vast undiscovered ocean. It had rolled on, ever since the world began. It had changed its course sometimes, and turned into new channels, leaving its old ways dry and barren; but it had ever been upon the flow, and ever was to flow until Time should be no more. Against its strong, unfathomable stream, nothing made head. (121)

The scientific nature of the Victorian era shows in the allusions to discovery, the beginning of the world and progress. Related to these, discourses of colonial conquest are also present: the “undiscovered ocean” carries implications of colonialism, the British fleet and the problematic of “discovery.” But the point of interest here is the river: it is ever in motion, “leaving its old ways dry and barren.” The perception of the river resembles the description of dialectics which “comprehends things [...] in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin, and ending” (Engels, *SUS* 126). The river also furnishes a social reading: the “old ways” that become “dry and barren” refer to feudalism in this instance, while the “new channels” refer to the progresses made by the introduction of capitalism. If the river becomes a metaphor for social change, the “strong, unfathomable stream” then implies a perplexity, suggesting that the social structure and its changes are somewhere unreachable by human mind. Marx himself warns against this type of thinking in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: “What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of ‘Society’ as an abstraction *vis-à-vis* the individual. The individual is *the social being*” (qtd in *OLA* 70). This

idea of unreachability is highly ideological, as it can be used to prevent attempts of change. It also leaves room for the myth of the eternal nature of capitalist society, further consolidating the status of bourgeois society in the minds of people and in the superstructure.

## 2.6 Submission and Passivity

The thought of society as unreachable and perpetual entails passivity and submission. Engels characterises the benefits of religion to the bourgeoisie as “opportunities [...] for working upon the minds of his natural inferiors and making them submissive to the behests of the masters it had pleased God to place over them” (“OHM” 98). In the mid-Victorian period, “the conflict between religion and science” assumed prominence (Ford and Christ 896), and a slight challenge to religion can be observed in “Nobody’s Story” as well. After Nobody loses his loved ones, the faint beginnings of what Gurney observes about *Our Mutual Friend*, that “Christian morality no longer offers a guide [...]” (242), appear in the story. To the preacher who visits him, Nobody says, obediently and desperately: “O what avails it, missionary, to come to me, a man condemned to residence in this fetid place, where every sense bestowed upon me for my delight becomes a torment, and where every minute of my numbered days is new mire added to the heap under which I lie oppressed!” (123). He desperately wants to ease his thoughts with religion – “none know better than you, how willingly” (123) – but he cannot escape the material needs of life: “give me my first glimpse of Heaven, through a little of its light and air; give me pure water; help me to be clean; lighten this heavy atmosphere and heavy life [...]; gently and kindly take the bodies of those who die among us, out of the small room [...]” (123). Nobody seems to be saying that he cannot concern himself with immaterial divinities before his material needs are met: “and, Teacher, then I will hear [...] of Him whose thoughts were so much with the poor, and who had compassion for all human sorrow!” (123).

Nobody asserts the same religious tone even before the spread of the disease. After seeing the path his children go down, he starts to realise the need for proper leisure, as



he looked about him on his Sundays and holidays, and he saw how much monotony and weariness there was, and thence how drunkenness arose with all its train of ruin. Then he appealed to the Bigwig family, and said, “We are a laboring people, and I have a glimmering suspicion in me that laboring people of whatever condition were made—by a higher intelligence than yours, as I poorly understand it—to be in need of mental refreshment and recreation. See what we fall into, when we rest without it. Come! Amuse me harmlessly, show me something, give me an escape!” (122)

It is not that “mental refreshment and recreation” are purely human needs, but they have been inserted “by a higher intelligence than yours.” Although Nobody belittles himself with statements like “as I poorly understand it,” he does understand quite a few things just by observing. But what he understands, he ascribes to a “higher intelligence,” not to the material conditions that his life is built on. He does not, for example, grasp that the “heavy life, in which our spirits sink, [...]” (123) and from which he needs an escape, could be improved in itself. For him, the only way to ease it is a momentary escape. Like the fireplace, recreation provides a temporary release which mainly works to perpetuate the “heavy atmosphere and heavy life” (123) by providing just enough energy to endure such conditions.

The story produces an image of a passive recipient of whatever activity the Bigwigs feel content to provide him with, as Nobody pleads: “Come! Amuse me harmlessly, show me something, give me an escape!” (122). If they give anything at all, Nobody will be satisfied. But the Bigwigs fail: “there arose among the Bigwigs such roaring and raving, such pulpiting and petitioning, such maundering and memorializing, such name-calling and dirt-throwing, such a shrill wind of parliamentary questioning and feeble replying—where ‘I dare not’ waited on ‘I would’—that the poor fellow stood aghast, staring wildly around” (122). Again, the imagery of bureaucracy and politics takes the stage, although the imagery of bureaucracy is already evoked before the passage, when Nobody “appealed to the Bigwig family [...]” (122), activating the lay and legal meanings of

the word “appeal.” Again, the story draws attention to the loss of progressive characters, as in the artwork: the “few voices [...] proposing to show” Nobody “the wonders of the world” are “faintly heard” (122). The traces of what Eagleton calls “a progressively impoverished bourgeois liberalism” (*CI* 161) emerge here. The exaggerated reaction of the Bigwigs also raises the question of class. Nobody wonders: “‘Have I provoked all this,’ said he, with his hands to his affrighted ears, ‘by what was meant to be an innocent request, plainly arising out of my familiar experience, and the common knowledge of all men who choose to open their eyes? I don’t understand, and I am not understood. What is to come of such a state of things?’” (122). Even leisure and the activities it enables have ideological significance: *what* is given access to becomes of very much importance. It is no wonder, then, that the Bigwigs cannot agree.

The Bigwigs’ incompetence has positive effects as well, for it startles Nobody out of his naïve torpor and pushes him to think for himself. This time, he does not go to the fireside to “get it out of his mind,” but keeps “asking himself the question” (121, 122). When Nobody confronts his Master’s accusations, he states that he has “begun to understand a little [...]” (123). When the Master continues: “O you laboring men! How seldom do we ever hear of you, except in connection with some trouble!” (123), Nobody even shows signs of wider understanding: “‘Master,’ he replied, ‘I am Nobody, and little likely to be heard of (nor yet much wanted to be heard of, perhaps), except when there *is* some trouble. But it never begins with me, and it never can end with me. As sure as Death, it comes down to me, and it goes up from me’” (123). Nobody shows what might be called a faint understanding of the historical conditions of his time and the need for collective action. Yet, the story also produces a fixed, almost religious outlook deferring action to a higher power, as Nobody states that “it never can end with me,” “it comes down to me, and it goes up from me.”

## **2.7 Resolution?**

There is not much hope in the Bigwig family’s response to Nobody’s pleas, either. The narrator says: “There was so much reason in what he said, that the Bigwig family, getting wind of it, and being

horribly frightened by the late desolation, resolved to unite with him to do the things that were right [...]” (123-24). But they only do these things “so far as the said things were associated with the direct prevention, humanly speaking, of another pestilence” (124). They do not attempt to help because they think it is the right thing to do, but because they are afraid for themselves. Consequently, “as their fear wore off, which it soon began to do, they resumed their falling out among themselves, and did nothing” (124).

Contrary to Gurney’s remark about *Our Mutual Friend* suggesting that capitalists lack accountability (241), “Nobody’s Story” still attempts to maintain some sense of fairness, although the way it does this seems to be rather an easy fix. As the Bigwigs resume their old habits, “the scourge appeared again—low down as before—and spread avengingly upward as before, and carried off vast numbers of the brawlers” (124). The story quickly resolves, or at least undermines, this sense of fairness, as it continues: “But not a man among them ever admitted, if in the least degree he ever perceived, that he had anything to do with it” (124). The story’s ending seems to conform to two phenomena: first, “corporate capitalism,” which “meant that they [capitalists] now had less fear of retribution” (Gurney 241), and second, “the sheer quantity and increasing authority of statistical evidence at mid-century,” with which “a crisis of accountability can be detected in public discourse [...]” (Hadley 75).

The story is unable to come to an ending which would resolve its problems: “So Nobody lived and died in the old, old, old way; and this, in the main, is the whole of Nobody’s story” (124). Nobody succeeds in none of his attempts to better anything around him, and, in the end, dies of what sounds like the disease, although the reader is left speculating. Overall, the story leaves plenty of room for speculation, but it also briefly addresses the lack of information at the end: “Had he no name, you ask? Perhaps it was Legion. It matters little what his name was. Let us call him Legion” (124). That Nobody is produced so vaguely without class-consciousness, specific identity, or specific occupation is an ideological act which, as Gurney says in the context of the Veneerings’ dining room

described in *Our Mutual Friend*, “obfuscate[s] the reality of underlying social relationships” (234). Nobody is almost completely detached from the world, and the story adheres to what Eagleton calls an “aesthetic ideology of ‘type’ and ‘totality’” (CI 126).

This “type” emerges at the end, when the narrator concludes thus:

If you were ever in the Belgian villages near the field of Waterloo, you will have seen [...] a monument erected by faithful companions in arms to the memory of Colonel A, Major B, Captains C, D and E, Lieutenants F and G, Ensigns H, I and J, seven non-commissioned officers, and one hundred and thirty rank and file, who fell in the discharge of their duty on the memorable day. The story of Nobody is the story of the rank and file of the earth. They bear their share of the battle; they have their part in the victory; they fall; they leave no name but in the mass. (124)

The narrator makes Nobody’s story a myth similar to that of the unknown soldier. He becomes a hero of all classes for his hard work and sacrifices, a nameless character which can be conflated into a mass of people like him; in short, a type – or a “Legion” (124). At the end, the narrator invites everyone to honour their memory: “O! Let us think of them this year at the Christmas fire, and not forget them when it is burned out” (124). The story, again, resolves to an easy fix by urging sympathy and remembrance, hoping that this will be an adequate way to solve material problems.

Lastly, one should note that Dickens was a professional author writing for a market, such as the Christmas market (Thomas 62). As Thomas notes, in his Christmas writings between 1850 and 1861, “[...] Dickens seems to be largely composing to satisfy his readers’ expectations—expressing familiar Christmas feelings or developing more or less exciting plots which might be understood by all” (93). Indeed, Dickens acknowledged his readers. He utilised “the image of the fireside” for marketing purposes: he promoted “his novels as fireside tales belonging to a familiar tradition of oral narrative [...]” (Buckland 3, 2). Furthermore, he used in his texts devices, such as rhythm and alliteration, which foreground “the materiality of spoken language” (Buckland 2). As can

be seen, “Nobody’s Story” is no major deviance from this tradition. The third-person narrator, who speaks as if telling a story to someone, the literary devices (alliteration, repetition, and parallel structures), and even the name of the collection of stories which “Nobody’s Story” is part of (*Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire*) all attest to the fact that Dickens went through the trouble of creating, and more importantly, *selling* a certain image of his writings. Yet, Dickens is not an author that moves “from ‘individualism’ to ‘community’” (Eagleton, *CI* 130), a trait which can be seen in the ideological basis of “Nobody’s Story,” despite the story’s seeming communality.

### 3 Conclusion

While the story seeks an improvement in the conditions of working people, it naturalises and supports the limits of the bourgeois society that oppresses them. It produces a viewpoint from which workers are a fairly passive and nameless mass who deserve pity and sympathy, and it does not go beyond the limits of reconciliation and reform. Especially in the context of the aftermath of the 1848 Chartist demonstration and other international working-class movements (Engels, "OHM" 102), the ideological message of the story becomes more prominent and perhaps even attempts to remind the public of what could be in its view the more favourable solution to social problems. Dickens was not a supporter of the Chartists (Butterworth 135), and "Nobody's Story" seems to be doing ideological work largely in accordance with the ideological requirements of the economic base. It resembles the type of text, which, as Eagleton notes about Dickens' later novels, builds on "a set of conflicts and non-relations now grasped as systemic" (CI 130). The term "non-relations" seems especially fitting considering the anonymity and detachedness of Nobody.

To some extent, the story grasps the problems of its time, but it is unable to connect them to the economic base that gives rise to them. Dickens believed that permanent social change would result from a Christian "change of heart in each individual" (Butterworth 140). This largely constitutes the governing ideological principle of "Nobody's Story." The story's ideological ground resembles that which Marx describes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* from 1852: "The peculiar character of the Social-Democracy is epitomized in the fact that democratic-republican institutions are demanded as a means, not of doing away with two extremes, capital and wage labor, but of weakening their antagonism and transforming it into harmony" (qtd in OLA 84). No matter how revolutionary the movement seems, its content consists of "the transformation of society [...] within the bounds of the petty bourgeoisie" (qtd in OLA 84). "Nobody's Story" operates "within the bounds" and according to the necessities of its economic base, although its liberal ideology and petty-bourgeois critique seem at times to challenge the capitalist structures of its time. Considering, then,

Dickens' reputation as a social critic, and the capitalist structures which continue to exist, although in more developed form than in Dickens' time, it proves both necessary and relevant to examine critically the narratives, and by extension, authors, that have a reputation as socially conscious.

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