

**Walter Gay's Voyage Away from Home
in *Dombey and Son* :
Dickens's Usage of the Imperial Periphery
for His Young Hero's Happy Ending**

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1. Introduction

Dombey and Son centers on a relationship between Mr. Dombey and his daughter Florence, in which this proud, hard-bitten merchant is finally transformed into a sensitive, soft-hearted father. Twisted with this central thread, as an indispensable sub-thread, is Walter Gay's success story. Walter improves himself socially and financially and wins the hand of his employer's daughter, thus personifying the Dick Whittington legend. Initially, he was to have a very different fate, as Dickens revealed in a letter to John Forster on 26 July 1846. Dickens explained his plan to show "that common, every-day, miserable declension of which we know so much in our ordinary life" by describing Walter "gradually and naturally trailing away, from that love of adventure and boyish light-heartedness, into negligence, idleness, dissipation, dishonesty, and ruin," and asked for Forster's opinion (*Letters* 4: 593). The exact nature of Forster's advice is unknown, but while proofing the third installment of the monthly serialized novel, Dickens changed his mind and said to his friend, "*About Walter Gay*: I see it will be best as you advise, to give that idea up" (ibid. 658). This change of heart was followed by Walter's voyage to the West Indies in the thirteenth chapter, which is part of the fourth monthly installment. Dickens thus shipped his young hero out of England in order to ensure a happy ending for him.

The renewal of Walter's story has been debated by critics such as Beth Herst, F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, and Harry Stone (Herst 31-34; F. R. and Q. D. Leavis 24; Stone 10). Stone sees it as a "damaging reversal" because the expectation of Walter's future success encouraged in the opening pages was to perform the significant function of highlighting

“the blighting effect of the new business ethic,” which Mr. Dombey’s methods and business embodied, if the expectation were turned upside down as originally planned (10). Among these studies, the discussion focuses on Dickens’s decision to let Walter have a happy ending, but not on his subsequent decision to let him leave his homeland.

Moreover, since Kathleen Tillotson observed that “[t]hrough the whole novel echoes the sea” (189), numerous critics have identified the sea as the literal and symbolic center of the novel and analyzed it from various standpoints. Aside from a few recent critics including Matthew Kerr and Ella Westland, the majority have examined the maritime and nautical elements of Florence, Paul, Mr. Dombey, and the Wooden Midshipman. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the real sea most directly encountered by Walter, who is commonly dismissed as “scarcely one of the more interesting figures in the novel” (den Hartog 69). Even Kerr and Westland mainly focus on the nautical narratives interwoven into Walter’s story in the form of allusions, rather than on Walter’s actual seagoing experience.

This essay will then examine Dickens’s motivation behind Walter’s voyage from home in order to end his story on a happy note. Walter’s happy ending consists of social success and a happy marriage at home, or in other words, triumph in the public and the private spheres of early Victorian England. Therefore, the examination will be accompanied with an investigation into Dickens’s perception on each of the gendered and polarized spheres in contemporary ideologies. Hence, this essay will also reveal the authorial difficulties Dickens encountered when writing the story that headed towards a *bildungsroman*-like self-realization of his young hero. Consequently, the discussion of this essay will correct the tendency of previous studies to slight Dickens’s second decision about Walter and disregard it as a sort of whim. *Dombey and Son* is Dickens’s best-structured and organized story at that point in time, which, as John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson write, represents “a new chapter in his work” (90). Besides, in this first mature novel, “[t]his question of the boy is very important” (*Letters* 4: 593) as Dickens himself admitted. Considering these facts, it seems inappropriate to assume, as previous studies have done, that Dickens shipped his boy off overseas without any adequate or important reason.

2. Walter’s Escape from the Corrupt World of Commerce

Walter achieves financial and social success, but Dickens initially planned that his ambition would lead to his moral and spiritual deterioration. Some traces of this plan can still be seen in the parts of the novel written before Dickens’s change of heart. The

clearest of these is Walter's entry into the House of Dombey and Son to comply with the wishes of his uncle, Sol Gills. Gills's maritime shop, the Wooden Midshipman, is out-of-date. He is well aware of his own impotence in the modern capitalist society as he confesses, "I am an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop" and "I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch it again" (94). Consequently, he urges his nephew to "be early in the busy world, and on the world's track" and to "[b]e diligent, try to like it, [...] work for a steady independence, and be happy" (94). At the same time, he attempts to dampen his nephew's enthusiasm for maritime adventures, in which sailors routinely emerge as successful figures, by saying, "As to the Sea, [...] that's well enough in fiction, Wally, but it won't do in fact: it won't do at all" (95). While Gills innocently expects Dombey and Son to lay out a path for his nephew to success and happiness, the House is in fact a microcosm of a commercialized society, which operates based on economic value and subordinates hearts and feelings to its financial interests. Although based on his praiseworthy affection for his uncle, Walter's participation in the contaminated world of Mr. Dombey was to signal the beginning of his downward trajectory into "negligence, idleness, dissipation, dishonesty, and ruin" (*Letters* 4: 593). Moreover, it is likely that his initially determined life story is analogous to that of John Carker, a junior at Dombey and Son. He entered the firm as a high-spirited boy like Walter but became so obsessed with money that he "slipped a little and a little lower [...] until he fell headlong and found himself below, a shattered man" (248). This ruined employee shows "an extraordinary interest" (137) in Walter, which is "an interest in a young man who was to fall as he had fallen" (Butt and Tillotson 99).

Dickens renounced the idea that *Dombey and Son* would trace the descent of a high-spirited boy at a very early stage, but he returned to this idea later with Richard Carstone in *Bleak House*. Forster, who proposed the revision of Walter's story, indicated that "the idea thrown out took subsequent shape, amid circumstances better suited to its excellent capabilities, in the striking character of Richard Carstone" (431). Richard ruins himself after being enslaved by the law case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce as "a monument of Chancery practice" (33). If the Court of Chancery operates, as James Brown notes, as "a business firm, regarding suitors as business assets — remunerative commodities valued solely in quantitative terms of exchanging-value" (61), Richard takes over his predecessor's original life. Consequently, Richard's life, which strays from that of "[his] namesake Whittington," (80) on whom he muses in his boyhood, and Walter's life, which Captain Cuttle joyfully defines as a realization of the legend by saying "Turn again Whittington" (974) stand in contrast.

What is more interesting, but disregarded by Forster, is that despite the contrasting ways in which the stories end, they are similar in how a decision about whether to leave their homeland is a significant turning point. For Richard, the decisive moment that accelerates his path to ruin is when he turns down the chance to distance himself from Victorian England. When Richard enrolls in the Horse Guards and receives directions to join a regiment in Ireland, his friends expect that this assignment overseas would wean him away from his fruitless obsession with the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case. However, saying, "how could I have gone abroad" (701), he leaves the army and immerses himself entirely in the fatal case. His resultant moral, mental, and physical enervation along with his financial deterioration is externalized as Richard becomes "thin and languid" (926) and his "youth and youthful beauty [have] all fallen away" (926). Meanwhile, Walter seizes the chance to depart from England, albeit unwillingly. As William Axton remarks, "the wreck starts him on a career in commerce that by the end of the novel has achieved a solid if modest success" (41). On the way to Dombey and Son's foreign office in Barbados, Walter is shipwrecked and saved by a ship in the China trade, and he then works for the trader while making a voyage, and obtains promotion after being favored. The departure followed by this shipwreck and imperial traveling separates Walter from the House of Dombey and Son, which is an embodiment of materialistic early Victorian society. This functions as a prelude to his revised narrative trajectory.

The commercial activity Walter engages in on board the China trader can be inferred to be uncontaminated by the cash nexus, unlike that which takes place in his homeland. This uncorrupt condition of work allows the young merchant to return to England with "the bronzed cheek and the courageous eyes," and "the generous fervour of his youth, and all its frank and hopeful qualities, shining once more, in the fresh, wholesome manner, and the ardent face" (786). This appearance contrasts with that of Richard, who has been blighted by staying at home, thus externalizing the outcome of Walter's escape overseas, the avoidance of his original degradation. Leaving his homeland and visiting the imperial periphery also contributes to Walter's further progress as he sails towards more success in China before being appointed to "a post of great trust and confidence at home" (974). It is pertinent that this positive nature given to trading in the imperial periphery must be a convenient idealization rather than an accurate reproduction, as suggested by the fact that Dickens evades describing its details and specifics.

In both the original and the modified versions of Walter's story, which are the stories of Richard and Walter respectively, their homeland of early Victorian England is shown as a dangerous place where young men risk moral and spiritual devastation while seeking

social and financial success. The possibility is, in Dickens's words, so "common" and "every-day" (*Letters* 4: 593) that Walter is forced to leave his homeland to ensure that his story ends happily. Through the agency of his voyage, Walter transforms himself into a successful-but-uncorrupt man of business. Rosemary Coleman and Andrew Elfenbein refer to this young man as "the ideal Economic Man" (133) and "almost the ideal mercantile manager" (381). Further, both argue that the marginalization of Walter's business, due to its being outside the center stage of the novel and being little described, brings about his perfection (Coleman 134-35, Elfenbein 381-82). They felicitously designate Walter, but they should note that the imperial periphery is indispensable for the marginalization, and the margins are positioned as an alternative to and an antithesis of the center of the British Empire.

3. The Domestic Sphere Feared as Being Threatening to Men

Walter's escape suggests Dickens's somewhat complicated perception of the contemporary ideology of separate gendered spheres. The world of money and business that Dickens thought as capable of corrupting Walter, a youth aspiring to be a self-made man, can be redefined as the public sphere. His view of the sphere reflects the prevailing Victorian middle-class ideology, in which it was understood as belonging exclusively to men and "composed of mutually antagonistic and competing individuals in which men easily lost their moral bearings in a relentless striving for selfish ends" (Hatten 65). Based solely on this fact, however, we should not assume that Dickens firmly believed in the separate spheres. Even if he was an advocate of polarized gender roles, he did not optimistically believe that the concept could be smoothly realized in Victorian England. According to the above ideology, "the home and the family, in particular the women of a man's family, were to embody an influence toward moral elevation and spiritual regeneration for individual men" (*ibid.* 65). The women's sphere of the home was thus to serve as the realm where men escaped from the public sphere to be healed. Dickens was skeptical of this function of the domestic sphere as a kind of sanctuary, so he located not the home but the home-land's exterior as the antithesis of and the shelter from the public sphere.

Dickens's skepticism toward the private sphere arises from his opinion that women could be a serious threat to men, and this opinion is suggested through Mr. Dombey's fear of his daughter Florence. Although Dickens, as we will discuss later, values feminine virtue highly and demonstrates its significance for men, he simultaneously believes that

femininity can be disharmonious with masculinity. Numerous critics, including Robert Clark, Andrew Elfenbein, Helene Moglen, Julian Moynahan, and Claire Senior, among others, have seen the conflict between masculinity and femininity as the central theme of the novel. While there is little consensus among them on whether femininity is celebrated, especially the femininity furtively but continuously exerted by Florence, they unanimously claim that masculinity is undermined, particularly the masculinity exaggerated in Mr. Dombey. As Senior rightly sums up, feminine influence potentially serves to “weaken not only male authority, but male identity,” which is exactly what Mr. Dombey fears (112). Mr. Dombey is always afraid that his authority is subverted inside the home as it is ideologically presided over by women, and that his masculinity is enervated by feminine virtues theoretically positioned as opposite to male ones. Once we are aware that Mr. Dombey senses such threatening feminine power in Florence, we can understand his animosity against and rejection of her, which otherwise may remain enigmatic because their source is not articulated. His hatred for his daughter, which becomes increasingly stronger as she is growing up to be a paragon of femininity, is his mask to conceal his fear of her, or rather, women as a whole.

Dickens's perception of the threat the angel in the house poses to masculinity leads him to suggest that the home is unsafe for men. He describes it in Mr. Dombey's fear of Florence only in an insinuating way in order to shield Florence from a scathing criticism. His first priority in the main plot starring Mr. Dombey and his daughter is placed on valorizing domestic influences and feminine virtues associated with the novel's heroine, not on disclosing her secret side as a pestilent, destructive angel in the house. Dickens instead criticizes the threatening position of the women's sphere openly in a sub-plot featuring Mrs. MacStinger, Captain Cuttle and Captain Bunsby, although comically lest a tone of the critique severely undermine his heroine's values.

Mrs. MacStinger, who is Captain Cuttle's landlady, spends her time obsessively cleaning and washing, and she is described as “a pattern for her sex” (952). This woman can be categorized as an effective rather than an indictable housewife. However, she is assertive in her own sphere and protests that “an Englishwoman's house [is] her castle” (180), not “an Englishman's house is his castle.” Her intense territoriality over the home is again apparent in her retort when her house is referred to as Captain Cuttle's: “it's *my* house” and it should not be his house “for Cap'en Cuttle don't know how to keep a house” (404). In addition, she is so eager to enact her gender role that on “Mrs MacStinger's great cleaning days” (403), she does the cleaning from early in the morning until midnight. On this occasion, her tenant Captain Cuttle is cast away “on a very small desolate

island, lying about midway in an ocean of soap and water,” and he “look[s] round on the waste of waters with a rueful countenance, and seem[s] waiting for some friendly bark to come that way, and take him off” (405).

Dickens caricatures the power to subjugate and debilitate men inherent in what is called the weaker sex through his depiction of the widow landlady Mrs. MacStinger. This caricature culminates in the scene of her wedding to Captain Bunsby. In the wedding, “a triumphant procession” is “headed” by the bride (950). The female leader “wear[s] conspicuously attached to her obdurate bosom a stupendous watch and appendages, which [Captain Cuttle] recognise[s] at a glance as the property of Bunsby” (950). If bosoms are routinely linked to femininity, and time is associated with masculinity in the novel as Nina Auerbach argues (97–99), then this zoomed-in picture of triumph is, like the previous zoomed-out image, a prediction of the future relationship of the newly-wed couple. The power of the new wife is already so dominant that the bridegroom is “conducted under her arm” (950), and can do nothing but “with the distraught and melancholy visage of a captive borne into a foreign land, meekly resign[.] himself to her will” (950). Moreover, this wedding shows that women have the potential to be a destructive force for men visually as well as verbally. As Michael Steig notes, the illustration of the scene titled “Another Wedding” (Figure 1) teems with details which reflect the novel’s main theme of the “capture and imprisonment” of the male sex by the female (108). For



Figure 1: “Another Wedding”

Illustrated by Hablot K. Browne (“Phiz”) in *Dombey and Son*, Chapter 60

example, the caged bird over the hung up sailor's hat symbolizes the life without liberty that awaits Captain Bunsby as a married man (ibid. 109). Thus, the parody of Mr. Dombey's fear with this wedding as the climax discloses Dickens's view that women and their territory are not likely to succeed completely as helpmates and shelters, respectively, for men.

4. The Opposing Positions of the Home and the Exterior

Significantly, the story, where a *land-lady* and two *sea-faring* men are cast as the protagonists, involves a pun on the domestic domain — the home and the home-land. By doing so, Dickens equates the domestication of the home with the confinement of being ashore. Captain Cuttle complains, “the lady of the house [...] stopped my liberty” of leaving home by “some words about the swabbing of these here planks” (407). Even after running from Mrs. MacStinger's, he is still afraid of his ex-landlady, believing that “once immured [in his old lodgings], he [is] a lost man” (534). He is terrified of losing his male authority and identity after being captured and tamed by the domestic manager. This nightmare of Captain Cuttle turns into reality, albeit in his substitute's life, not in his own. When about to be caught by Mrs. MacStinger, he is saved by Captain Bunsby, whom he admires as “the great Commander” (638). The commander, who has just *landed* in the home-land after “a coasting voyage” (637), acts as a “convoy *home*” (emphasis added; 645) for the lady in place of his comrade. In consequence, this *sea-faring* man is trapped by the *land-lady* and forced to wed her. At their wedding, the victimized captain is so “secured” by his wife that “any effort at self-preservation by flight [is] rendered futile” (953). He can do nothing but look “with an immovable countenance, at the opposite side of the world” (953), as if dreaming of a voyage. This sight induces in Captain Cuttle a great fear that the detention of a man in the home-land with his taming by a domestic angel will be repeated, and resultantly “the seafaring line [is] doomed” through “a series of ages of oppression and coercion” (954). Further, in the illustration “Another Wedding” (Figure 1), we can see a poster for recruiting sailors and another advertising a production of *Black-Ey'd Susan*, a play about a wife loyally and patiently waiting for her seafaring husband to come home. These posters ironically remind us of what Bunsby is being compelled to surrender, i. e., the liberty of sailing abroad and keeping a distance from his home-land.

Here, men's terror of being domesticated in the home is linked to their fear of being confined in the home-land, which results from another critical view of Dickens about

England as capsulated in Mrs. MacStinger's wedding. During the wedding procession, the husband of Mrs. MacStinger's friend "evidently exult[s] at the reduction of a fellow-creature to his own condition" (952). This depiction implies that the victimization of men by women can be easily found in this country. What is "most frightful" (954) to men is that this kind of tragedy will repeatedly and widely occur as omened by Juliana MacStinger. This "promising child" of the bride and "already the image of her parent" exhibits "the deadly interest" in the wedding (954), and Captain Cuttle sees in her manner "a succession of man-traps stretching out infinitely" (954). In England, to put it in Dickens's expression, it is "common" and "every-day" (*Letter 4*: 593) for men to succumb to such a fate as that of Captain Bunsby as well as that of the original Walter to be ruined in the male sphere. Dickens has the view that the danger of domestication, the danger of the erasure of masculine authority and identity under the power of domestic female creatures, is pervasive in early Victorian England. Therefore, staying in the home-land is tantamount to being constantly exposed to this danger.

Moreover, the story of the captains reveals that the home-land's exterior is the last retreat from the threat. Even before his marriage to Mrs. MacStinger, Captain Bunsby is, like Captain Cuttle, victimized by his own landlady, another powerful angel in the house. Whenever he cannot bear to be "cruelly treated," he retreats to his "cautious craft [...] with her gangway removed, and half-a-dozen feet of river interposed between herself and her nearest neighbour," "set[ting] this gulf between [him and his landlady] as a last resource" (409). His ship offshore enables him to escape from the female sex and preserve himself, although the interval is ridiculously short. The Wooden Midshipman plays a similar role for Captain Cuttle. Its primary function for the captain when his twin, Gills, is present is that of a gentlemen's club-like space for homosocial convivial bonding. However, when Gills is absent, it is a refuge for the captain from the domestication attempts of Mrs. MacStinger. In the early chapters of the novel, Captain Cuttle visits the maritime shop to enjoy the male bonding with Gills and his nephew as well as to flee from his landlady. After Gills and Walter leave and Captain Cuttle moves in, it plays the role of "his castle of retreat" (637) and "his garrison" where he struggles to maintain his "self-preservation" from predation by Mrs. MacStinger (438). Importantly, the Wooden Midshipman "seem[s] almost to become a snug, sea-going, ship-shape concern [...] in the event of an unexpected launch, to work its way securely to any desert island in the world" (88). Captain Cuttle's stronghold looks like a ship rather than a commercial establishment. For Captain Cuttle as well as Captain Bunsby, to be on board and float away from land is the last recourse against their domination and emasculation by women,

although narrated metaphorically in the case of the former captain and mockingly in that of the latter.

However, the Wooden Midshipman's resistance against women is deficient. Coleman states that its exclusion of female creatures is finally perfected: "in the novel's closing pages neither woman participates in this male club of pipes, drams, and song — nor are the men of the Midshipman ever a part of the world of the tear-stricken, female sea-beach" (132). Although it is placed "in a permanent state of homosocial conviviality" in the denouement of the novel (Coleman 132), the Wooden Midshipman fails to accomplish the role of blocking out women and safeguarding men in the middle of the story of Mrs. MacStinger and her victims. It is in this ship-like space that the lady catches Captain Bunsby to prey on him within her territory after attacking her fugitive Captain Cuttle. The Midshipman's state of floating offshore, of being outside the homeland where men are usually exposed to the danger from women, is just false. Therefore, the space cannot become an authentic safeguard. Similar is the environment of the battlefield between the captains and Mrs. MacStinger. Their battle is disguised as an imperial adventure by describing the lady as a "terrible fire-ship" (408), an "enemy" (534), a "savage tribe" (637) and one of "cannibals" (637). Because this imperial setting is fictitious, the battle ends up as expected in the setting of the perilous homeland; a sea-fearing man is captured, whilst the land-lady emerges as "heroic" (534) and at last heads "a triumphant procession" (950).

5. Walter's Entry into Home through the Imperial Periphery

Unlike its imitations, the real exterior of the homeland serves as an authentic antithesis of the home. It offers the true environment free of the fear of female influence, so that Walter easily displays and develops his masculinity to be admired as a heroic figure. When he is shipwrecked, Walter exhibits a heroic performance by being "firm and cheery" even "when the stoutest and oldest hands [are] hove down" and "working with the best, and standing by the faint-hearted, and never making no complaint nor sign of fear, and keeping up a spirit in all hands" (783). Consequently, the passengers "[make] 'em honour him as if [he were] a admiral" (783). Then, after being salvaged by a China trader, he experiences further imperial adventures and develops his masculinity. Mr. Toots as a foil gestures toward the fact that Walter has undergone a wholesome masculinization throughout a series of imperial experiences. Mr. Toots was educated in Doctor Blimber's school, which was like a "hothouse" with "a forcing apparatus" (206), a

site capable of producing a tropical climate. After being forced to grow up in an unnatural way in this fictitious imperial environment, Mr. Toots becomes physically, mentally, and intellectually deficient, which indicates his lack of masculinity. This hot-housed young man “warm[s] as he be[comes] better acquainted with Walter’s face and figure” (797) when he meets Walter, who has just returned from the genuine imperial realm. For Walter now possesses “the bronzed cheek,” “the courageous eyes,” “the ardent face,” and “the fresh, wholesome manner” (786) of a masculine man. Mr. Toots is made to sense his own inferiority to his rival in love, who responds to him “manfully” (797), so that he calls Walter “Lieutenant” (797) as if acknowledging his sense of being lost. Owing to his real imperial adventure, Walter has transformed himself into a young man with a healthy and superior masculinity who deserves the titles of “admirals” and “lieutenants” he admired as heroic figures in his boyhood.

Walter’s imperial adventure seems to anticipate imperial adventure stories of the late Victorian period, where, roughly speaking, male protagonists exhibit their unrestrained masculine power and masculinize themselves through dangers and trials in the environment of what H. Rider Haggard calls “not a *petticoat*” (9). Interestingly, adventure narratives widely consumed in late Victorian England have “[male] fears of manly decline in the face of female power” at the bottom (Showalter 83), and so does Walter’s adventure story interwoven in the early Victorian novel *Dombey and Son*.

On the other hand, however, Walter’s adventure story is crucially different from late Victorian adventure fiction in what it aims for. The latter portrays the flight from heterosexual love and marriage as what late Victorian men longed for, and the marginalization of feminine concerns of marriage and family as what male authors of the time desired (ibid. 78–83). Contrarily, Walter’s adventure is the preparation for marriage to the heroine on Dickens’s side as well as on Walter’s. Walter’s story finally orients itself toward marriage and family in order to end happily, for Dickens acknowledges their significance for men as revealed in the negative examples provided by Mr. Dombey and the Wooden Midshipman. Mr. Dombey runs the home on business lines and excludes women’s influence from his whole life. As a result, his world becomes abnormally rigid and hard, and his House along with his home is ruined. As for the Midshipman, its world is also characterized by the exclusion of women. Instead of exaggerating their masculinity, its members, Sol Gills and Captain Cuttle, develop their own feminine selfhood to fill the absence of women. These self-feminized men are impotent within the masculine sphere of business. Mr. Dombey’s ruin and the Midshipman’s impotence as members of the male sex imply that women’s power, which is unique and complementary to men’s power,

is necessary for the success of men's lives. This idea of beneficial domestic influences exerted by women is suggestive of the conventional gender role ascribed to women or, as Patricia Marks observes, "a trend toward domestic culture and 'woman worship'" (19) in early Victorian England. Because of the approval by Dickens of the conventional gender roles, a peaceful marriage is counted as an indispensable constituent of Walter's happiness at the ending.

However, the marriage is not an easy issue for Dickens because, as we have demonstrated, he senses that domestic angels are potentially a destructive force for men. So Walter is required to develop his masculinity enough to be able to match Florence's femininity before entering into her private sphere in order that he will establish a harmonious household. Dickens leaves this training of Walter to the imperial periphery. This is because Dickens imagines, or, to be more precise, idealizes the space, in a way late Victorian writers of imperial adventures do, as the realm where conditions far away from the threatening petticoats at home can be naturally achieved, differently from the worlds of Mr. Dombey and the Midshipman embedded in the homeland. In this peripheral space, Walter easily and wholesomely exerts masculine power and fosters masculinity.

Due to his adventures on the imperial periphery, Walter's masculinity has matured to the point where he is invulnerable to the dangers of being subordinated and enervated by Florence, the extreme epitome of the angel in the house whose secret lethality could be very serious. Dickens suggests this by putting Walter in metaphorical contrast with Mr. Dombey. In the novel, William Palmer claims that Dickens "first employed the metaphor of shipwreck as a controlling motif" (65), and Mr. Dombey and Florence, like Walter, experience different shipwrecks, albeit theirs are symbolical. The breakdown of Mr. Dombey's firm and family, which indicates the collapse of the life of this exaggeratedly masculinized merchant, is equated with the shipwreck. The same nautical imagery is employed to objectify the psychological state of Florence immediately after she is violently and conclusively rejected by her father, to illustrate the state of being emotionally orphaned and homeless. In the former episode, Mr. Dombey is rescued by his daughter, and subsequently, wholly loses his masculinity under her influence. Inversely, in the latter episode Florence pleads, "Oh, help me, Walter, for I need help so much!" (788), and is saved by Walter. The contrasting roles given to Mr. Dombey and Walter as rescuer and rescued of Florence imply that, unlike Mr. Dombey, whose masculinity is finally dissolved into Florence's watery feminine world, Walter maintains his male authority and identity in his relationship with Florence. It is noteworthy here that Walter's role as a savior is accentuated by the fact that he is a "recovered boy" (786) who has exhibited a

heroic performance at the actual shipwreck and survived the incident. In terms of the novel's structure as well, the experience in the imperial periphery sets up Walter as a masculine heroic figure who is a match for the powerfully feminine Florence.

Walter's healthy and sound masculinization on and across the sea leads to the establishment of a patriarchal household, to conform to what was considered ideal in early Victorian England and what is called "a crucial stage in winning social recognition as an adult, fully masculine person" (3) in John Tosh's landmark study on Victorian masculinity. Critics such as Coleman and Senior oppose this idea that Walter possesses authority and effectiveness as a husband. They claim that Walter and Florence's family deviates from ideal Victorian domesticity, more specifically, heterosexual paternal domesticity, largely because their binding is not conjugal but fraternal. Coleman argues that Walter's relationship with Florence is asexual, and therefore their marriage cannot be defined as blissful domesticity or happy union (138-39). Senior likewise states that Walter is a Paul-like brother who needs to be rescued, and this state of Walter is "an emasculating gesture on the author's part" (118-19). However, as other critics argue, the couple's final relationship is adult and connubial, or at least has this kind of sense about it (Michie 147-48; Stone 12-13; Wood 104). Although we cannot say that Dickens transforms what he himself has emphasized until this point as fraternal by a convincing and skillful sleight of hand, he nevertheless announces that the pair becomes an adult heterosexual couple by allowing Walter to confess to Florence, "I have not a brother's right, [...] I have not a brother's claim. I left a child. I find a woman" (804). "The colour" which "overspread [s] her face" (804) in response to these words also implies her sexual recognition of Walter's transition from a brother to a prospective husband. Later, Walter has children with Florence. Begetting children is what Tosh explains as being "integral to a fully formed masculinity" (79). Their children are a testimonial to Walter's potency, especially the potent sexual power he possesses as the husband. Besides, their honeymoon is a voyage to China. This signals that because his masculinization has been successfully accomplished, Walter no longer needs the imperial periphery as a place to foster his masculinity far away from feminine influence.

6. Conclusion

Dickens shipped Walter from the homeland, just after the decisive turn to end Walter's story on a happy note consisting of social and familial success, or in other words, triumph in the public and the private spheres. As we have seen, this is because Dickens

saw early Victorian England as perilous for men due to the risk of moral and spiritual corruption in the degenerate world of capitalism, and the risk of surrender and emasculation under the potentially threatening influence of women. Instead of this dangerous Home, the imperial periphery was set as the stage for the development of his young hero because he imagined that the margins were left out of the pestilence from the commercialized world and the domesticating world located in the center of the British Empire. This imagined, or rather idealized, environment of the periphery makes it possible for Walter to transform himself into a successful-yet-uncorrupt man of business and a wholesomely and soundly masculinized man. It is this transformation outside the homeland that brings about what Walter as a young high-spirited boy wished for — his perfection within the homeland with the achievement of financial and social success and the establishment of a peaceful, patriarchal family.

Although this wish fulfillment appears to be typical of the *bildungsroman*, Walter's life story cannot be categorized into this genre. Regarding this fact, Lyn Pykett explains that Walter's story does not produce "a form of the 'epic of inwardness'" as Walter's trials mostly take place on the off-stage, in the periphery of the novel where their details and specifics are omitted (23). She goes on to say that the novel does not narrate Walter's engagement with "a complex psychological, social and historical reality," but instead it concentrates on "the magical or legendary aspects of Walter's rise" (23). Walter's transformation is not the development of a character whose process is traced in detail and whose internal logic is related. Hence, it should be called a magical metamorphosis, not a growth of the kind that can be found in the *bildungsroman*.

Pykett's comments from above capture the features of Walter's transformation, but judging from what has been demonstrated in this essay, her opinion about the strategies Dickens employs in it does not seem to be fully accurate. Dickens uses the marginalization of Walter's imperial experiences and romantic narratives including the Dick Whittington legend as a skeleton framework of his story. Pykett argues that by means of these strategies, Dickens keeps Walter in a childish state of innocence, thereby articulating "a refusal to accept as natural and inevitable the 'miserable declensions' of 'ordinary life,'" that is, a denial of "the pessimism of the social and moral determinism" he intended to show in the initial plan for Walter (24). However, as we have observed, he never gave up his pessimistic view of early Victorian England. Or rather, Dickens's alarm over his homeland is stronger in the altered story of Walter than in the original one, as the threat to young English men Dickens fears as "common" and "every-day" (*Letters* 4: 593) is doubled.

The reason why Dickens had recourse to the peripheral margins of the novel and a romance framework, through the agency of which Walter was metamorphosed, is that he could not create a *bildungsroman*-like story of a male character. This is also what very fundamentally motivated Dickens to send Walter overseas. Dickens aimed for Walter's social and familial achievements, but he could not conceive a process towards this happy ending when it took place within the homeland, where the public and private realms were both perilous. Therefore, he forced Walter to escape into the periphery he fancied as a refuge capable of safely developing Walter in the appointed happy direction, an ideal place able to easily prepare Walter to emerge in the homeland with successful and happy self-realization. Even if the stage of his development preparatory to the intended happy ending was changed, however, nothing else was changed. For Walter's escape from the homeland was no more than an escape on Dickens's side into the idealized, illusory periphery from the difficulties he found in writing a convincing and detailed progress toward duplicated happiness in the dangerous spheres. He was incapable of mastering the problem underlying Walter's voyage, and he was thus forced to resort to transforming Walter in an unrealistic and magical way.

Walter's voyage from Home lays bare not only Dickens's dual critical view of his homeland, but also the authorial limitations Dickens faced in the early Victorian period. At the time *Dombey and Son* was written, Dickens had no alternative but to desperately run away into the illusory periphery and turn to miraculous means. This creates a precarious situation for Walter, a situation in which his perfection is unquestionable at a superficial level but insubstantial in essence, despite its being an indispensable driving force of the main plot later in the novel. This precariousness of the young hero very possibly contributed to Wilkie Collins's dissatisfaction: "the latter half of 'Dombey' no intelligent person can have read without astonishment at the badness of it, and the disappointment" (3). Yet Dickens attempted to challenge his authorial limitations with *David Copperfield* in his next novel.

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