

The Most Dangerous Predator: The Court of Chancery

The Court of Chancery's institutional predation in *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens

Molly Connor

Hanover College English Department

Dr. Melissa Eden

Fall term 2013

Abstract

In this paper, I examine the Court of Chancery as an institutional predator in Charles Dickens's novel *Bleak House*. I first present Chancery as a system that uses methods that mimic biological predation to influence its institutional predation of its suitors. The main motive behind Chancery's predation is to keep its system functioning. It stays alive by absorbing three primary resources of suitors: time, money, and life. It then causes its lawyers and Krook to form parasitic relationships with the suitors in order to take away their resources. I then observe three consequences to Chancery's predation: Chancery becomes a source of both physical and mental disease; Chancery lacks transparency, making it difficult for suitors to understand its predatory methods; and Chancery is a bad parental figure to its wards, inhibiting any social progression. Through these consequences of Chancery's predation, Dickens portrays Chancery as an old institution that attempts to prevent the progressive social systems in Victorian England.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Dr. Melissa Eden foremost for all of her help with my senior thesis. She first introduced me to the genius of Charles Dickens in my junior seminar, where I developed a sense of admiration for his works. She also was an excellent advisor for my thesis, as she provided terrific advice and last minute editing to my rough drafts. I also want to thank Dr. Uschi Appelt who originally instilled this idea for a thesis topic in my head. Without talking to her, I probably would not have attempted this project. I want to thank the library staff for accommodating me by providing a study carrel for me. This study carrel proved to be essential to finishing my thesis since it was a place where I could work without interruption. I also want to thank my roommates, Madeline Ashby, Leila Cahill, and Betsy Cochran, as well as my significant other, Robert Curtin, for all of their support and vital study breaks. Lastly, I want to thank my parents, Neal and Marta Connor, for encouraging me to read throughout my childhood. Because of them, I have always held a deep appreciation of and passion for books.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Chancery the Predator	6
Chapter 2: Chancery as a Source of Disease	27
Chapter 3: Chancery’s Lack of Transparency	42
Chapter 4: Chancery the Bad Parent	56
Conclusion.....	65
Bibliography.....	67

Introduction

“This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man’s acquaintance; which gives to monied might the means abundantly of wearying out the right; which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart; that there is not an honorable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, ‘Suffer any wrong that can be done you, rather than come here!’”
(Dickens 11-12)

This is the Court of Chancery in Charles Dickens’s novel *Bleak House*, an infamous legal system of predation. Dickens takes the image of the Chancery system, also known as the Court of Equity, and modifies it to resemble a predator in order to demonstrate its injustice. In the beginning, Chancery resembles an animalistic predator. Predation in this sense refers to the “consumption of one organism (the prey) by another organism (the predator), in which the prey is alive when the predator first attacks it” (Begon et al. 266). The Court of Chancery feeds its bloodthirsty appetite by baiting its prey, the suitors, with the illusion of justice. It dominates and exploits characters in a variety of ways—it seeks to gain financial power over its suitors and it consumes the suitors’ time by dragging cases through multiple generations of families. Some characters, such as Richard, Miss Flite, and Gridley, eventually become obsessed with their suits, investing themselves entirely in settling their cases, and die before Chancery reaches its judgments. The lawyers within the court become the hunters of the suitors. Wholes, a bloodsucking barrister, causes the death of his host Richard through his parasitic predation. Tulkinghorn, the sly solicitor, selectively targets his victims to assert his power. Thus, the Court of Chancery exhibits some animalistic characteristics of predation—its parasitic lawyers hunt the suitors for their resources in order to continue the survival of the system.

Yet, as the novel progresses, the Court of Chancery transforms into an institutional predator. Chancery's predation as an institution creates an umbrella effect with three main consequences. The first consequence of Chancery's social predation is that Chancery becomes the source of disease. This disease is both physical and mental. Both forms demonstrate Chancery's neglect for its suitors, as Chancery creates lethal environments in Tom-all-alone's and causes characters to become addicted to its procedures, resulting in death for Tom Jarndyce, Gridley, and Richard. These forms of disease ultimately weaken the characters physically and mentally, making them vulnerable to the abuses of Chancery. The second consequence is that Chancery lacks transparency because it is a complicated system. Chancery's inscrutability causes the characters, even those who work within it, to not understand how it works. The characters cannot stop Chancery from working since no one can fathom its complexity. The third result is that Chancery is a bad parental figure for its wards. It abandons its duties to protect and provide acceptable upbringings for the characters who rely upon it for survival. This effect enforces the traditional aristocratic hierarchy, where the characters have no social mobility. These three effects of Chancery's social predation suggest the intricacy of the system. Because the Court of Chancery is not strictly an animalistic predator, it reflects the complexity of humans as prey. In order for Chancery's predation to be successful, it must be able to attack humans in ways that affect the biological and mental vulnerabilities of the characters as well as their positions within society.

This is Dickens's Court of Chancery—the animalistic and institutional predator that hunts the most dangerous game—humans.

Chapter 1: Chancery the Predator

“And thus, through years and years, and lives and lives, everything goes on, constantly beginning over and over again, and nothing ever ends [in the Court of Chancery]. And we can't get out of the suit on any terms, for we are made parties to it, and must be parties to it, whether we like it or not.” (Dickens 109)

John Jarndyce's comment regarding the Court of Chancery captures how the court coerces characters to become its suitors. The pernicious Chancery preys on the characters in order to feed its existence by exhausting several of their resources: mainly time, money, and life.

Chancery's primary method of obtaining these resources is to enlist lawyers to pursue the suitors. They form relationships with their clients that are synonymous with the relationships between parasites and their hosts. The suitors suffer due to the lawyers who prey upon them by means of Chancery's lengthy suits. They are imprisoned as their lives are confined to legal procedure, which Dickens represents in Miss Flite's birds, who represent a microcosm of the Chancery's relationship with its suitors. Thus in *Bleak House*, Dickens's Court of Chancery uses the biological notions of predation as a model for its institutional attacks on the characters.

The Court of Chancery's predation resembles that of the ecological predator. An ecological predator ingests another organism, the prey. One key aspect in the predator/prey relationship is that the prey must be alive when the predator first attacks it (Begon et al. 266). Chancery's behavior fits this denotation of an ecological predator since it attacks characters while they are alive by forcing them to participate in suits. For instance, Chancery uses Jarndyce and Jarndyce to procure several generations' worth of suitors, as “Fair wards of court have faded into mothers and grandmothers; a long procession of Chancellors has come in and gone out; the legion of bills in the suit have been transformed into mere bills of mortality” (Dickens 13). The methods of Chancery's predation are mostly parasitic since Chancery does not immediately kill its victims. Rather, Chancery drags its cases on, slowly draining all of the characters'

possessions. It uses the lawyers to form intimate relationships with its suitors similar to those behaviors of a parasite and its host. Parasites are predators that “consume parts of their prey (their ‘host’), rather than the whole, and are typically harmful but rarely lethal in the short term .

. . [the parasites’] attacks are concentrated on one or a very few individuals during their life.

There is, therefore, an intimacy of association between parasites and their hosts that is not seen in true predators and grazers” (Begon et al. 266). The relationship between Vholes and Richard is an example of this kind of parasite and host relationship. Vholes slowly sucks the life out of Richard, including all of his money and time. He even places himself within the same vicinity as Richard to ensure that he can continue to feed from Richard. Similar to the host, Richard does not die immediately, yet his cause of death is Vholes’s influence over him from their intricate connection. Thus, Vholes uses the ecological aspects of predation to feed from his host.

Because Chancery is a predator, it tricks characters into succumbing to it. As a predator, Chancery utilizes deception to lure characters into its perpetual cycle of injustice. Chancery appears attractive to characters because the characters believe that they will fulfill their desire for justice. However, Chancery is a system of injustice—a system that uses characters to sustain itself. Without such characters, Chancery would not be able to survive financially, nor would it have suits to resolve. Esther uses the metaphors of the Dead Sea and ashy fruit to describe the deception that the Court of Chancery uses to lure characters. She says, “I look along the road before me, where the distance already shortens and the journey’s end is growing visible; and, true and good above the dead sea of the Chancery suit, and all the [ashy] fruit it casts ashore, I think I see my darling” (Dickens 561). Gill explains that the ashy fruit from the Dead Sea were the apples of Sodom and “were said to look lovely but taste ashy” (935). Chancery tricks characters by distorting its suits to enthrall individual suitors by turning their lives to ash.

John Jarndyce harps upon this idea when he tells Esther that the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit has dramatically changed from its original purpose. He asserts that ““The Lawyers have twisted it into such a state of bedevilment that the original merits of the case have long disappeared from the face of the earth”” (Dickens 107). By means of this deception the Court of Chancery gives a false sense of hope to Richard and Tom Jarndyce. Both believe that they can resolve their own cases despite the fact that no one else in years has reached a successful settlement. Richard tells Esther that:

He had got at the core of that mystery now, he told us; and nothing could be plainer than that the will under which he and Ada were to take, I don't know how many thousands of pounds, must be finally established, if there were any sense or justice in the Court of Chancery—but O what a great if that sounded in my ears—and that this happy conclusion could not be much longer delayed. (Dickens 340)

Richard incorrectly assumes that he has unraveled the undetermined judgment for Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Rather than solve the mystery of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Richard becomes infatuated with his suit and stalks the court (Dickens 340). The late Tom Jarndyce had a similar experience. John Jarndyce recalls how Tom attempted to resolve his own Chancery suit when he states, ““He gave [Bleak House] its present name, and lived here shut up: day and night poring over the wicked heaps of papers in the suit, and hoping against hope to disentangle it from its mystification and bring it to a close”” (Dickens 109). Thus, characters who seek to resolve their cases in order to escape the clutches of Chancery ironically further subjugate themselves to Chancery's abuses. Their attempts to conquer the injustice of the system are in vain as their participation in Chancery procedure increases, making it easier for Chancery to integrate them into its predatory system.

One aspect of predation is Chancery's ability to exhaust several resources, specifically time, money, and life. This depletion of resources is a parasitic method that Chancery uses to survive—the characters invest their time into seeking settlements; they spend large sums of money for their cases to proceed; and they eventually die while waiting for their judgments. The suitors are the hosts that feed Chancery's operation. Dickens describes Chancery as a system that “exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart; that there is not an honorable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, ‘Suffer any wrong that can be done you, rather than come here!’” (11-12). This feature of Dickens's portrayal of Chancery parallels the concerns of British people during the Victorian Era. The functioning of Chancery during the Victorian period was a legitimate concern for people of the middle and lower socioeconomic classes because “it swallowed up smaller fortunes with its delays, its fees, its interminable paper processes” (Langbein 1628-1629). Dickens's Chancery system in *Bleak House* comprises the same problems as the historic Victorian legal system, such as legal expenses and slow procedure. This indicates Dickens's belief that the Chancery of the 19th century was a system of predation. Without feeding off of the suitors' resources, neither of the courts would be able to function.

One of the resources that Chancery exhausts is time. Dickens exhibits Chancery's ability to waste time in two ways: through its actual procedure and through the length of its suits. The process of moving a case through Chancery was arduous, extensive, and clunky. For a suit to begin in Chancery, all of the people with interests in the case had to become individual parties so each party could defend his or her interests. Then each party chose his or her representation. Once all of the parties chose their representation, they decided how to proceed with the case. Some events such as one of the parties dying or one of the parties getting married delayed the

suit process. Also, copying all of the legal documents was a long and laborious process (Lobban 391-392). Because the court procedure was time-consuming, the time to settle the suits was lengthy. With these problems in mind, Dickens creates two cases to criticize the lack of speed in the Court of Chancery. The first suit is Gridley's case, which has lasted twenty-five years, has had seventeen parties, and has an estate that has been entirely absorbed in costs (Dickens 229-231). Gridley's case has lasted so long that he states his "whole living was . . . shamefully sucked away" (Dickens 231). Dickens's second example presents a more extreme critique of Chancery—the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case. Dickens models Jarndyce and Jarndyce after the infamous Jennings case, which began in 1798 and remained unsettled in 1915 (Korg 5). Similar to the Jennings case, Jarndyce and Jarndyce has lasted for generations. Dickens tells us that the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case "drones on" and "drags its dreary length before the court" (13). It is the source of misery for many of its suitors and of confusion for those who work in Chancery itself:

This scarecrow of a suit has, in course of time, become so complicated that no man alive knows what it means. The parties to it understand it least, but it has been observed that no two Chancery lawyers can talk about it for five minutes without coming to a total disagreement as to all the premises. . . Scores of persons have deliriously found themselves made parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce without knowing how or why; whole families have inherited legendary hatreds with the suit. (Dickens 13)

Jarndyce and Jarndyce has lasted for so long that no one completely understands the case. Because none of the characters can agree to a settlement, the case remains open. Therefore, Chancery is able to reap the benefits from the lengthy suit. Chancery exercises its role as a

predator in this instance since its attacks are during a long span of time. The drawn-out suits increase Chancery's revenues, furthering draining the resources of the suitors.

The second resource that Chancery exhausts is money, money that should rightly go to the suitors. Since Chancery suits were time-consuming, the suitors had to pay expensive fees to continue their cases. This was a problem because "'Costs in the cause' could swallow up a large proportion of the sums sought to be recovered. Suitors in Chancery had to pay fees at every step in the procedure: which were for the most part appropriated by the officers themselves" (Lobban 394). The fees were important because they provided the income for many of those who worked in Chancery, a fact that caused many people to suspect those officials of purposely extending the length of suits (Lobban 394-395). Dickens shares this suspicion and he thus shows Chancery's exhaustion of financial resources in several places in *Bleak House*, most notably the accumulation of costs in Gridley's case and in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit. Gridley's case is gradually becoming a case of costs, while Jarndyce and Jarndyce is already a case of costs. Gridley mentions how expensive both suits are when he points out to John Jarndyce that "'Now, Mr. Jarndyce, in your suit there are thousands and thousands involved where in mine there are hundreds'" (Dickens 231). The expenses of Jarndyce and Jarndyce drain the wealth of the characters active in the case. One prominent example is Richard. Richard spends all of his own money pursuing a resolution for the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit. Due to reckless spending habits, he uses Ada's money to pay for the suit, as well, and her money "melts[s] away with the candles" (Dickens 852). In spite of his efforts to pay for Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Richard becomes impoverished and owes Vholes money. Because Richard invests all of his money in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, he is in debt and under the power of Chancery. Vholes tells Woodcourt that "If Mr. C is to continue to play for this considerable stake, sir, he must have funds.

Understand me! There are funds in hand at present. I ask for nothing; there are funds in hand. But, for the onward play, more funds must be provided; unless Mr. C is to throw away what he has already ventured—which is wholly and solely a point for his consideration”” (Dickens 720). Vholes acknowledges that Richard’s involvement in Jarndyce and Jarndyce is expensive and that if Richard stops paying, his efforts to reach a settlement will be in vain. Vholes also assumes that Richard will continue to pursue a resolution in Jarndyce and Jarndyce since he tells Woodcourt that he will need more money for Richard’s ongoing pursuit. Vholes’s statement insinuates his knowledge that Richard is infatuated with his case and will not stop pursuing it until he is satisfied, which further affirms the parasitic intimacy Vholes has with Richard. Richard’s obsession with Jarndyce and Jarndyce causes him to develop the cult mentality because he has invested so much time, money, and effort in Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Thus, Chancery operates in a similar fashion to a cult by giving Richard an identity in Jarndyce and Jarndyce and reinforcing his beliefs that he is vital to Chancery proceedings (Buzard). Because Richard invests large sums of money into financing Vholes’s assistance and his suit, he is more likely to continue to participate in Chancery’s proceedings so as not to waste his investment. Vholes realizes Richard’s behavior and exploits Richard’s fascination with his case through monetary means.

The third resource that Chancery exhausts is human life. Early in the novel, Dickens indicates that the humanity of the suitors decays in the Court of Chancery. He writes, “This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire. . . which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man’s acquaintance” (12). Because the processes of Chancery are slow and the suits are so expensive, the suitors physically and mentally waste away. Esther

notices this connection when she attends court and comments on how difficult it is “to see everything going on so smoothly, and to think of the roughness of the suitors’ lives and deaths; to see all that full dress and ceremony, and to think of the waste, and want, and beggared misery it represented; to consider that, while the sickness of hope deferred was raging in so many hearts, this polite show went calmly on from day to day, and year to year, in such good order and composure” (365). Thus, Chancery ruins the lives of countless characters, specifically Tom Jarndyce, Gridley, Richard, and Miss Flite, through driving them to poverty, misery, and death. With these effects of Chancery in mind from previous instances, the long deceased Tom Jarndyce perceived the Court of Chancery as a system of torture. Krook explains that Tom Jarndyce used metaphors to illustrate the drawn out pain that Chancery inflicts upon its suitors. He recalls, ““For . . . it’s being ground to bits in a slow mill; it’s being roasted at a slow fire; it’s being stung to death by single bees; it’s being drowned by drops; it’s going mad by grains”” (Dickens 65). This prolonged effect of Chancery motivated Tom Jarndyce to commit suicide, as he mentally deteriorated into depression (Dickens 64-65).

Moreover, like that of Tom Jarndyce, Gridley’s mental well-being decays, and this decay leads to his death from exhaustion. He tells John Jarndyce that Chancery has consumed all of his energy to the point where he can no longer survive:

‘I thought, boastfully, that they never could break my heart, Mr. Jarndyce. I was resolved that they should not. I did believe that I could, and would, charge them with being the mockery they were, until I died of some bodily disorder. But I am worn out. How long I have been wearing out, I don’t know; I seemed to break down in an hour. I hope they may never come to hear of it. I hope [everybody],

here, will lead them to believe that I died defying them, consistently and perseveringly, as I did through so many years.’ (Dickens 372)

Even Gridley, whose passions Bucket compares to those of a bull dog, cannot outlast the Court of Chancery (Dickens 372). A system of injustice, Chancery feeds off of these deaths since these deaths further delay the judgment of the suits (Lobban 391-392). Although Richard and Miss Flite do not die before their suits end, both suffer due to Chancery’s means of depletion.

Richard’s physical appearance changes to reflect his mental anguish. Esther claims that Richard looks ruined as she admits, “I cannot use the expression that he looked old. There is a ruin of youth which is not like age; and into such a ruin, Richard’s youth and youthful beauty had all fallen away” (Dickens 856). He eventually wastes away and then dies after he receives judgment for Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Miss Flite, on the other hand, does not physically die; rather, her lunacy worsens. She attends court daily and awaits the verdict on her case, which is not likely to ever end.

In order for Chancery to be an effective predator, it requires lawyers, which are the extensions of itself, to form intimate relationships with their clients. The lawyers within Chancery prey upon certain characters who have suits in the Court of Chancery. The lawyers in *Bleak House* appear to be as inhuman as the Chancery system itself—they exploit the trust of characters for their own benefits. As scholar Phoebe Poon explains, “In *Bleak House*, lawyers are presented as the least trustworthy of trustees. Experts in living off their clients’ legacies, trust funds and secrets, they are not so much engaged in a profession of trust in which the ethic of service overrides the profit motive as a trade in which the pursuit of profit is paramount” (16). The solicitors are avaricious and work to gain as much profit as possible. They appear to be cold, calculating, and emotionless. Mr. George assumes that the lawyers are a different breed of

people because they have lost part of their humanity (Dickens 735). Through the lawyers' interactions with characters like Mr. George, Dickens presents Chancery lawyers as creatures who lack morality and any emotional attributes, which is the antithesis of Dickens's ideal moral behavior. The cruel and calculating Chancery lawyers are the hunters who gather clients. They are essential for Chancery's predation because they are so closely connected to the clients. The lawyers maintain complete control over their clients to the point of becoming parasitic. Dickens presents Vholes and Tulkinghorn as examples of predacious attorneys who each have their parasitic relationships with their clients Richard and Lady Dedlock. Both are intimately connected with their clients and exploit them for their own personal gains.

Vholes, a pernicious attorney, victimizes his client Richard. Vholes's name indicates that he is a predator because a vole is a field mouse that destroys crops (Crompton 300). Similar to the vole, Vholes feeds from a source, which happens to be Richard. He relies upon Richard for the survival of his career and his family—he cleverly deceives Richard to make him believe that he needs Vholes's legal expertise. Because Richard thinks that he needs Vholes's help to seek a settlement in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Richard gives him all of his money. Without Richard's obsession with Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Vholes cannot continue his career as a lawyer, as the system needs suitors who come with both money and a yearning for justice (Wilkinson 244). In order to keep Richard involved in the system, Vholes exploits Richard's sense of trust. Vholes persuades Richard to trust him and he claims, "It is my duty to attend to your interests with a cool head" (Dickens 576). He compares himself to a rock, an object of stability, to show his loyalty in protecting Richard's interests (Dickens 579). This rock, however, appears to be a symbol of destruction similar to the rock Scylla, which destroyed those within its vicinity (Hamilton 284). Yet, Vholes gains Richard's trust and he is able to control Richard. He keeps

Richard physically close to him—in his tiny office—and he directs Richard’s living arrangements, which are near his office (Dickens 572, 725). He even attempts to isolate Richard from his wife Ada by suggesting that Richard’s marriage is “‘exceedingly ill-advised’” (Dickens 855). Vholes tries to eliminate Richard’s other relationships so that Richard will become completely dependent upon Vholes. Vholes, ironically, is completely dependent on Richard because Richard is his host.

Since Vholes needs Richard for his survival, Dickens uses several images to suggest that Vholes is notably a parasitic, but also a vampiric predator. Esther first calls Vholes a vampire when she senses that he sucks Richard’s life away, as Richard is “‘So slow, so eager, so bloodless and gaunt, I felt as if Richard were wasting away beneath the eyes of this adviser, and there were something of the Vampire in him’” (Dickens 854). As a parasitic and a vampiric predator, Vholes feeds upon Richard’s interest in Jarndyce and Jarndyce by twisting it into an obsession. Richard becomes the “‘host’” for Vholes’s hunger and Vholes looks at Richard “‘as if he were making a lingering meal of him with his eyes as well as with his professional appetite’” (Dickens 856, 575). Vholes uses Richard’s fixation with the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case to suck away his youth and eventually his life. As a parasite and vampire, Vholes does not immediately kill Richard. He keeps Richard alive long enough to take all his resources from him. Therefore, Vholes’s attacks on Richard are lethal in the long-term. Vholes’s dependency on Richard suggests that he manipulates Richard for his own benefits and keeps himself emotionally distant from his relationships, like a sociopath. Esther observes that there is “‘not a human passion or emotion in [Vholes’s] nature’” (Dickens 854). Vholes’s lack of humanity makes his behavior take after a vampire, the undead parasite. Vholes also resembles a vampire in his movement: he glides (Dickens 901). Such gliding is unnatural for humans, which suggests that Vholes has a

phantom-like quality. This phantom-like quality associates Vholes's character with death. His clothing also plays into this idea of death; Vholes always wears black attire; he does not dress in the colors of the living. His clothing is so dark that Esther claims it sizzles when he stands next to a fire, omitting a foul odor. She asserts, "Mr. Vholes, whose black dye was so deep from head to foot that it had quite steamed before the fire, diffusing a very unpleasant perfume, made a short one-sided inclination of his head from the neck, and slowly shook it" (Dickens 644). His black gloves are significant, too. Esther describes them as dismal calling them, "funeral gloves" and "dead gloves" (Dickens 644, 645). Vholes's dark attire in general makes him appear to be a predator that is evil and is related to death. Vholes is both a parasite and vampire—his exploitation of Richard is premeditated and he continually feeds upon Richard until he dies.

Dickens presents a second lawyer, Tulkinghorn, to elaborate upon this image of the lawyers as predators within the Chancery system. In contrast to Vholes, Tulkinghorn obtains power over other characters, specifically Lady Dedlock and Mr. George, by unearthing secrets and then resorting to blackmail. Tulkinghorn is a parasitic predator in a more sophisticated way than Vholes since he feeds upon intangible substances to gain power. Tulkinghorn recognizes the value of secrets because a secret is "a far less tangible form of property, but one that confers greater power on its possessor" (Poon 11). Tulkinghorn focuses his attacks on the immaterial and civilized aspects of humans, such as reputation. Therefore, his attacks affect characters on a purely psychological level. The relationship between Tulkinghorn and Mr. George demonstrates Tulkinghorn's attack on humans through psychological means. Tulkinghorn looms over Mr. George since he is ready to strike at any moment. Tulkinghorn's attacks are vicious because "[he] conceals his knives, then strikes to the core almost without warning" (Van Buren Kelly 262). Because Tulkinghorn's attacks are unpredictable, he causes Mr. George to feel anxiety.

Mr. George is paranoid of what Tulkinghorn will do and admits, “[Tulkinghorn] is a kind of man—by George!—that has caused me more restlessness, and more uneasiness, and more dissatisfaction with myself, than all other men put together” (Dickens 671). Mr. George’s paranoia about Tulkinghorn is rooted in Tulkinghorn’s deceptive and unknown motives. He confesses to Woodcourt, “[Tulkinghorn] keeps me on a constant see-saw. . . he keeps me prowling and dangling about him, as if I was made of the same stone as himself” (Dickens 671). As a good predator, Tulkinghorn prevents his victims of prey from understanding his attacks. This allows for Tulkinghorn to anticipate what his prey will do and to plan his response so that he can continue to maintain power. Tulkinghorn’s power over Mr. George has such a psychological impact on Mr. George that he feels a choking sensation after he talks to Woodcourt concerning his relationship with Tulkinghorn (Dickens 672). This reaction shows us how Tulkinghorn feeds on Mr. George’s fear, giving himself more power. Because Mr. George fears Tulkinghorn, he lives as a prisoner under Tulkinghorn.

However, Dickens best exemplifies Tulkinghorn’s parasitic predatory demeanor through his relationship with Lady Dedlock. Tulkinghorn controls Lady Dedlock via blackmail, and he threatens to expose her secret. He warns her: ““Lady Dedlock, have the goodness to stop and hear me, or before you reach the staircase I shall ring the alarm-bell and rouse the house. And then I must speak out, before every guest and servant, every man and woman, in it”” (Dickens 606). Lady Dedlock dreads Tulkinghorn because she considers him to be her enemy (Dickens 790). His knowledge of her secret threatens her reputation, as Tulkinghorn has the power to expose her as a fraud. He argues to Lady Dedlock: ““It is no longer your secret. Excuse me. That is just the mistake. It is my secret, in trust for Sir Leicester and the family. If it were your secret, Lady Dedlock, we should not be here, holding this conversation”” (Dickens 687). The

third-person omniscient narrator also recognizes when Tulkinghorn gains control over Lady Dedlock, declaring, “He has conquered her. She falters, trembles, and puts her hand confusedly to her head. Slight tokens these in any one else; but when so [practiced] an eye as Mr. Tulkinghorn’s sees indecision for a moment in such a subject, he thoroughly knows its value” (Dickens 606). Although Tulkinghorn persists to obtain leverage over Lady Dedlock, his motives for doing so remain unclear, even to the narrator, who suggests that either Tulkinghorn might be jealous of Lady Dedlock’s fashionable appearance or that he is addicted to power or both:

Yet it may be that my Lady fears this Mr. Tulkinghorn, and that he knows it. It may be that he pursues her doggedly and steadily, with no touch of compunction, remorse, or pity. It may be that her beauty, and all the state and brilliancy surrounding her, only give him the greater zest for what he is set upon, and make him the more inflexible in it. Whether he be cold and cruel, whether immovable in what he has made his duty, whether absorbed in love of power, whether determined to have nothing hidden from him in ground where he has burrowed among secrets all his life, whether he in his heart despises the splendor of which he is a distant beam, whether he is always treasuring up slights and offences in the affability of his gorgeous clients—whether he be any of this, or all of this, it may be that my Lady had better have five thousand pairs of fashionable eyes upon her, in distrustful vigilance, than the two eyes of this rusty lawyer, with his wisp of neckcloth and his dull black breeches tied with ribbons at the knees. (Dickens 423)

Although the narrator cannot pinpoint Tulkinghorn's motives for pursuing Lady Dedlock, he discerns that Tulkinghorn is dangerous to her well-being. He comments that Tulkinghorn's two eyes are more treacherous than "five thousand pairs of fashionable eyes" (Dickens 423). Since Tulkinghorn is a predator, he must carefully observe all of Lady Dedlock's actions, which he does. His vigilant surveillance of Lady Dedlock and inscrutable motives of pursuit make him a grave threat to Lady Dedlock's fashionable reputation.

Similar to the narrator, Lady Dedlock can only guess Tulkinghorn's motives for hunting her. She believes that Tulkinghorn's motives for relentlessly pursuing her might be that he is envious of her aristocratic status, which she speculates to Esther: "[Tulkinghorn] is . . . mechanically faithful without attachment, and very jealous of the profit, privilege, and reputation of being master of the mysteries of great houses" (Dickens 536). She also claims that Tulkinghorn loves to have control, that it has become his "calling [to] the acquisition of secrets, and the holding possession of such power" (Dickens 536). Because Tulkinghorn's motive is unknown to her, his relationship with her becomes one of suspicion. Neither Lady Dedlock nor Tulkinghorn trusts the other, and as a result, they watch each other closely. Dickens writes, "One glance between the old man and the lady; and for an instant the blind that is always down flies up. Suspicion, eager and sharp, looks out. Another instant; close again" (495). In this way, they rely upon behavioral cues to interpret each other's unspoken communications. For instance, Tulkinghorn attempts to evaluate Lady Dedlock's emotions when he encounters her after he exposes her secret to the rest of the Dedlock family. He thinks to himself: "There is a wild disturbance—is it fear or anger?—in her eyes. . . Is it fear, or is it anger, now? He cannot be sure. Both might be as pale, both as intent" (Dickens 603). In response, Lady Dedlock combats Tulkinghorn's watchful gaze by controlling her behavior. Tulkinghorn observes her controlled

behavior, which the third-person omniscient narrator describes: “And [Tulkinghorn] thinks, with the interest of attentive curiosity, as he watches the struggle in her breast, ‘The power and force of this woman are astonishing!’” (605). Thus, Tulkinghorn controls Lady Dedlock’s reputation and her actions. Tulkinghorn’s intense methods of obtaining power over Lady Dedlock demonstrate that he is a predator. He is patient and observant of her responses. Tulkinghorn is parasitic since he feeds on Lady Dedlock’s fear of exposure in order to gain power. He also has a close relationship with Lady Dedlock—one that is too close for her comfort. She cannot escape him without exposing herself, even after his death.

Dickens does not limit the predation solely to the lawyers of Chancery. He includes Krook, the so-called brother of the Lord Chancellor. Krook, the Lord Chancellor of the Rag and Bottle Shop, is a predator in similar ways to Vholes and Tulkinghorn—he resembles a parasitic predator. He attempts to attach himself to characters such as John Jarndyce and Nemo. Esther notes that Krook takes on the role of a parasite to John Jarndyce because “[Krook] seemed unable to detach himself from Mr. Jarndyce. If he had been linked to him, he could hardly have attended him more closely” (Dickens 217). Krook studies John Jarndyce closely when he visits Krook’s Rag and Bottle Shop:

[Krook’s] watchfulness of my Guardian was incessant. He rarely removed his eyes from his face. If he went on beside him, he observed him with the slyness of an old white fox. If he went before, he looked back. When we stood still, he got opposite to him, and drawing his hand across and across his open mouth with a curious expression of a sense of power, and turning up his eyes, and lowering his grey eyebrows until they appeared to be shut, seemed to scan every lineament of his face. (Dickens 218)

In this passage, Krook closely observes his prey. Through his close observation of John Jarndyce, Krook attempts to understand his prey and to calculate his mode of attack. Because John Jarndyce is a suitor of the notorious Jarndyce and Jarndyce case, the Lord Chancellor Krook perceives of him as his prey. Similar to the lawyers, Krook hunts Chancery suitors to sustain his occupation as a shop keeper. Krook also thrives on Chancery's business, so he has some motivation to keep Chancery in operation. Yet, Krook's predation also affects those who work within the Court of Chancery. Krook targets a copier named Nemo and exploits him financially by charging him expensive rent rates. Krook exacerbates Nemo's poverty, which is already heavily influenced by Nemo's opium addiction. Krook benefits from the little money that Nemo possesses (Dickens 154). Despite the fact that Nemo dies and, as a result, cannot pay Krook any money, Krook shows a nasty fascination with Nemo's death when he "almost smacks his lips with the unction of a horrible interest" (Dickens 153). Krook's predation of Nemo is parasitic because he has a close literal relationship with Nemo—both live in the same building. But, Krook claims that he knows nothing of Nemo, only that "[Nemo] was my lodger for a year and a half, and lived—or didn't live—by law-writing, I know no more of him" (Dickens 154). Krook only seems to care about gaining wealth, rather than knowing his victims personally.

Dickens makes the lawyers and Krook hunters of the suitors of Chancery. These relationships of humans pursuing humans reduce humanity to its biological roots, showing us that Chancery's predation has an animalistic nature. In order to further convey Chancery's predation as animalistic, Dickens draws a parallel between the relationship of Miss Flite's birds with Lady Jane and the suitors with the Court of Chancery. Miss Flite's birds are symbolically important because they reflect the microcosm of the Chancery system. Their relationship with Lady Jane corresponds with the relationship between the suitor, the prey, and Chancery, the

predator because “Miss Flite’s caged birds symbolize the victims of Chancery, and the very names she has given them in her insanity are significant . . . And outside the cage lurks the cat Lady Jane, waiting, like the lawyers, to seize and tear any that might be free. Lady Jane is sometimes seen as a tiger and sometimes as the wolf that cannot be kept from prowling at the door” (Johnson 22). Lady Jane prowls around the cage looking for any free birds. Miss Flite believes that Lady Jane preys on the birds because she wants to keep them from obtaining liberty:

‘I cannot admit the air freely,’ said the little old lady; the room was close, and would have been the better for it; ‘because the cat you saw down stairs—called Lady Jane—is greedy for their lives. She crouches on the parapet outside, for hours and hours. I have discovered,’ whispering mysteriously, ‘that her natural cruelty is sharpened by a jealous fear of their regaining their liberty. In consequence of the judgment I expect being shortly given. She is sly, and full of malice. I half believe, sometimes, that she is no cat, but the wolf of the old saying. It is so very difficult to keep her from the door.’ (Dickens 67)

Lady Jane’s actions parallel the lawyers’ behavior—she closely observes and patiently waits for the birds to make any sudden movement. She keeps the birds encaged because their imprisonment gives her power. Similar to the suitors, the birds are confined in the cage of the Chancery system and cannot escape the predators’ watchful eyes (Korg 11). They remain in their cage until Miss Flite receives her judgment:

‘I began to keep the little creatures,’ she said, ‘with an object that the wards will readily comprehend. With the intention of restoring them to liberty. When my judgment should be given. Ye-es! They die in prison, though. Their lives, poor

silly things, are so short in comparison with Chancery proceedings, that, one by one, the whole collection has died over and over again. I doubt, do you know, whether one of these, though they are all young, will live to be free! Ve-ry mortifying, is it not?' (Dickens 65-66)

Like the cage, the Chancery system keeps its suitors, the birds, from escaping. This cage provides a symbolic example of how Chancery exhausts the lives of the suitors. Like the birds, the suitors live in a prison of procedure and die before the Lord Chancellor determines a judgment. Miss Flite's birds also demonstrate the suitors' symbolic cyclical pattern of dying in custody due to the ghastly length of Chancery procedures. Multiple generations of both suitors and birds have undergone the same Chancery procedures, causing even more individuals to be trapped in the Chancery system.

Moreover, the names of the birds are a significant parallel to the suitors. Miss Flite names her birds "“Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach”" (Dickens 217). The names of Miss Flite's birds reflect the progression of suitors:

[The] names of her ragged pets symbolize the downward course in the life of anyone imprisoned by Chancery proceedings. As such a one limps along through a case at Chancery, Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, and often Life soon die. If he survives, it is only to experience every stage of Want, Ruin, and Despair, until at last truth and falsehood, sanity and madness are all the same. (Van Buren Kelly 264)

Both Richard and Miss Flite show the effects of pursuing cases in Chancery as indicated through the names of the birds. On the one hand, once Richard becomes active in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, he slowly loses hope, joy, peace, and rest. He reveals his obsession with the judgment that the Lord Chancellor has not issued in decades when he tells Esther: “‘Either the suit must be ended, Esther, or the suitor. But it shall be the suit, the suit, my dear girl!’” (Dickens 725). His physical appearance changes as a result of his obsession, as a fatigued countenance replaces his youthful visage, which Esther notes, “So worn and haggard as [Richard] looked, even in the [fullness] of his handsome youth, leaning back in his chair, and crushing the closely written sheet of paper in his hand!” (Dickens 647). Richard eventually dies shortly after the Lord Chancellor settles Jarndyce and Jarndyce. On the other hand, Miss Flite’s experience with Chancery slightly differs from Richard’s. Similar to Richard, Miss Flite loses her youth and beauty while she is involved with Chancery. She tells Richard, Ada, and Esther: “‘I had youth, and hope. I believe, beauty. It matters very little now. Neither of the three served, or saved me’” (Dickens 43). Yet, unlike Richard, Miss Flite does not die— she loses her sanity, a loss which she claims happened during her involvement with Chancery. She explains, “‘Right! Mad, young gentleman . . . I was a ward myself. I was not mad at that time’” (Dickens 43). Despite the fact that she has not yet received a judgment in years, Miss Flite attends court regularly because she expects the Lord Chancellor to issue a settlement soon. She confesses to Richard, Ada, and Esther: “‘I have the honor to attend court regularly. With my documents. I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment’” (Dickens 43). Hence, Richard and Miss Flite are both examples of the two major ways that characters suffer the predatory influence of Chancery. Although their means of suffering are different, they both never escape Chancery’s influence. Similar to those of the birds, their lives are ruined due to the Court of Chancery.

Through Chancery's means of predation, it hunts the most dangerous game— humans. Since humans are complex creatures, Chancery uses biological methods of predation to influence its institutional attacks on them. The complexity of Chancery's attacks makes it more powerful as an institution, as Chancery is able to attack characters from multiple angles, and the characters struggle to react. These attacks have lethal consequences in the end, as the suitors' lives and moralities decay. Chancery's predation is vital to the system's existence because it needs the suitors and their yearning for justice to exploit them for their resources. Without the suitors and their yearning for justice, there would be no reason for Chancery to exist. Due to its predation, Chancery becomes a system of injustice because it dominates the suitors. Through Chancery's means of predation, Chancery becomes the ultimate predator to humans.

Chapter 2: Chancery as a Source of Disease

“‘Is it possible, guardian,’ I asked, amazed, ‘that Richard can be suspicious of you?’
 ‘Ah, my love, my love,’ [John Jarndyce] said, ‘it is in the subtle poison of such abuses to breed such diseases. His blood is infected, and objects lose their natural aspects in his sight. It is not his fault . . . It is a terrible misfortune, little woman, to be ever drawn within the influences of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. I know none greater. By little and little he has been induced to trust in that rotten reed, and it communicates some portion of its rottenness to everything around him.’” (Dickens 517)

Through the progression of *Bleak House*, Chancery becomes an institutional predator, where it uses social predation to attack its suitors. Chancery’s social predation produces some notable consequences, one being disease. Since Chancery is so focused on keeping its system in operation, it neglects its properties and the well-being of the characters who participate in the court procedures. Both Chancery’s properties, Tom-all-alone’s and Chancery Lane, rampantly spread contagion, causing characters to become ill and die. Although Chancery does not directly own the Rag and Bottle shop, Krook’s shop is congested with Chancery’s abandoned property, making it a location of disease within the system. Chancery also mentally contaminates Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard. All three characters become so engrossed with the Court of Chancery that they develop addictions to Chancery. As a result of Chancery’s social predation, Chancery uses physical and mental illnesses to make characters more vulnerable to its abuses in order to feed the system functioning. It creates filthy environments, such as Tom-all-alone’s, Chancery Lane, and Krook’s shop, filled with lethal contaminants, and it acts as an agent of addiction for Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard.

As an outcome of Chancery’s social predation, characters suffer from exposure to disease-infested places. Chancery neglects its properties because it focuses its efforts on taking the suitors’ material wealth and maintaining power. Chancery’s negligence spreads contamination by creating closed and filthy environments. The best example of a disease-ridden

environment that Chancery produces is Tom-all-alone's. Tom-all-alone's is a derelict place full of "street waste" and ruin, which has some similar characteristics to the slums in Victorian England (Dickens 236, 331). It is unsanitary, with "undrained, unventilated, deep black mud and corrupt water" (Dickens 330-331). Tom-all-alone's is clotted and glutted with many contagions, making it the perfect breeding ground for disease. Dickens describes the spread of disease in Tom-all-alone's as being similar to blood flow—Tom-all-alone's is a vein that transports the corruption of Chancery to the characters:

There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream (in which chemists on analysis would find the genuine nobility) of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say Nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge.

(Dickens 654)

Tom-all-alone's quickly and easily spreads diseases because there is nothing to stop it. Chancery abandons Tom-all-alone's, which allows for Tom to have his revenge by corrupting everything and everyone, from the lowest of the low in the social hierarchy to the "highest of the high" (Dickens 654). Due to Tom-all-alone's pollution, the characters who reside there suffer from the effects of Tom's grime. One example is Jo, who is covered completely in dirt and sores. He only wears rags, which means he is exposed to the dangerous elements such as the cold and

sickness. The narrator tells us that “Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him” (Dickens 669). These “homely” images of sickness that consume Jo indicate that he has integrated the poisons of Tom-all-alone’s into his life, and that Tom-all-alone’s has been contaminated for at least the entirety of Jo’s life since he considers them to be a part of his home. As a result of this overexposure, Jo dies along with the rest of the characters who “[die] down in Tom-all-alone’s in heaps” (Dickens 453). The disease from Tom-all-alone’s also threatens the characters who do not reside there. For instance, Charley and Esther become severely ill after they care for Jo when he is sick. Although Jo exposes Charley and Esther to his disease, they do not die because they remain outside of the vicinity of Tom-all-alone’s. However, Jo’s disease disfigures Esther’s face. This instance demonstrates that Tom’s revenge does not seem to discriminate in its attacks on characters based on social class. Rather, it strikes as many characters as it possibly can.

The disease within Tom-all-alone’s shows the corruption from Chancery’s social predation. Because of some predatory motive Chancery abandons its property, making Tom-all-alone’s almost inhabitable. Due to Chancery’s careless behavior, Tom-all-alone’s is a cesspool of decay, which physically weakens the characters’ health. Chancery’s negligence of Tom-all-alone’s shows that the system lacks morality since it causes devastation. Scholar Alice Van Buren Kelly explains, “Just as the inward decay of the former stems from the stubborn adherence to obsolete social and political practice, so the misery of the latter grows out of the stagnancy of the law . . . the decadence of Tom-all-Alone’s is created by the negligence of a society which, in its selfishness, is blinded to the misery at its core” (257). Because Chancery ignores Tom-all-alone’s, it also becomes a place of poverty. This poverty causes the characters to become more susceptible to disease because they lack adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Dickens harps

upon the evils of poverty, calling it a vice worse than drinking alcohol and argues that “If Temperance Societies could suggest an antidote against hunger and distress, or establish dispensaries for the gratuitous distribution of Lethe-water, gin-palaces would be numbered among things that were” (qtd in Welsh 24). As a result of the impoverished state of Tom-all-alone’s, the residents of it cannot afford to be healthy and must rely upon the help of individuals such as Esther and Woodcourt to revive them since the Chancery system refuses.

Chancery’s second property, Chancery Lane, is also a tainted place that spreads disease. Similar to Chancery’s behavior towards Tom-all-alone’s, Chancery likewise abandons Chancery Lane. It becomes a place full of rubbish and toxic elements, which Dickens describes: “It is a fine steaming night to turn the slaughter-houses, the unwholesome trades, the sewerage, bad water, and burial grounds to account, and give the Registrar of Deaths some extra business” (466). Chancery Lane is a polluted place with death in the air. This dismal image of Chancery Lane reflects a problem that was common in large cities during the Victorian Era—the unbalanced ratio between the amount of graves available and the number of bodies ready for burial. Dickens uses Chancery Lane to demonstrate the dangers of “the putrefying dead [that] should contaminate the air breathed by the living” (Gill 924). He describes the graveyard where the other characters bury Nemo as “pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed” (165). Because the disease in Chancery Lane poisons the characters, it becomes a moral detriment as well as a sanitation concern. The disease in Chancery Lane is preventable, meaning that Chancery fails in its moral responsibility to keep everything clean and transparent. Instead, Chancery Lane becomes a center for pollution and dirt.

Tangentially related to Chancery's properties, Krook's shop is completely obstructed with various items from Chancery's neglected suits, making it a breeding ground for disease within the system. The shop parallels Chancery's own congested rooms, as it contains hundreds of documents and items from suits. Krook admits to Esther that as a result of his hoarding, his shop is sullied. He confesses, "And I can't abear to part with anything I once lay hold of (or so my neighbours think, but what do they know?) or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery'" (Dickens 63). Because Krook's shop is overfilled with everything he collects, it lacks any type of circulation. He neglects to clean it, so it becomes symbolic of the unhealthy Chancery system, even as Krook himself comes to exemplify Chancery's unhealthy obsessions. Krook's shop suffocates some of the other characters such as Jobling and Guppy because it is a closed place. They have to open the windows so they can breathe (Dickens 474). Jobling's and Guppy's experience within Krook's shop suggest that Krook's shop parallels Chancery's properties because it is "the genesis of disease in the 'system' when it is glutted with combustible materials, the 'rubbish' of the body which is not properly thrown off, and which is inflammable" (Wilkinson 242). Since Dickens makes Krook's shop resemble Chancery, Chancery becomes the predatory exemplar for Krook. Chancery exploits its suitors by collecting as much material wealth as it can from them. Thus, Chancery becomes constipated with excess material, making it stagnant, sluggish, and unclean. In a similar way, Krook amasses so much stuff that his shop is dark from all of the items and dust. His shop allows for him to control his environment by creating several obstacles for his entering prey, impeding their movement and health. Both Chancery and Krook's shop are key locations for disease, as they are closed systems. These obstructed places help the social predators capture weakened and confused prey.

As the Court of Chancery weakens characters by neglecting to care for their environments, it also exploits the characters by taking advantage of their vulnerabilities through addiction. Because Chancery needs to function, it uses the suitors to gain as many resources as possible, and it ensnares characters into participating in the pernicious proceedings. Chancery becomes an agency of addiction due to its “magnetic center,” which pulls characters into a state of ruin (Wilkinson 227). It baits characters to participate in its system by giving them the illusion of justice. Miss Flite describes the addiction that the other characters experience to the Court of Chancery as “a dreadful . . . [and] cruel attraction” (Dickens 524). She declares that, “You can’t leave it,” as the characters completely succumb to the power of the Chancery (Dickens 524). Similar to drug addiction, the Chancery addiction “draw[s] people on. . . Draw[s] peace out of them” (Dickens 524). The characters gradually lose control over themselves as the Court of Chancery consumes their lives. Miss Flite compares Chancery to “cold and glittering devils” since Chancery’s façade of justice tempts characters to fall into it (Dickens 524). Her comparison also indicates that the Court of Chancery is a system of evil, for by feeding addictive behaviors it enhances its ability to operate as a social predator. The Court of Chancery lures characters with its false sense of fairness in order to use their time, money, and eventually their lives to keep its system functioning. The suitors who are addicted to Chancery willingly give their possessions to Chancery to maintain their Chancery “high.”

Because Chancery is an agency of addiction, it ingrains several typical addictive symptoms that addicts experience. For instance, according to the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, addictions develop because addicts consume substances in “larger amounts or over a [longer] period than was intended” (American 483). Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard all suffer from the lengthy suits and invest a lot of their personal

time in court and in researching their cases. Instead of finding settlements, they become more engrossed in the process. This forces them to spend “a great deal of time . . . in activities necessary to obtain” their Chancery “fixes” (American 541). Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard also develop cravings for the justice that Chancery denies to them, so they attempt to resolve the conflicts themselves (American 483). In their attempts to seek resolution, Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard become like most addicts in that their level of tolerance to the Chancery “drug” increases as they stalk court more and more. As a consequence of their increasing ability to tolerate high levels of exposure to Chancery, they cannot decrease their activity in Chancery. Richard admits that he has “a persistent desire . . . to cut down” his involvement in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, but he is unsuccessful (American 541). He asserts to Esther: “‘It’s not as if I wanted a [legal] profession for life. These proceedings will come to a termination, and then I am provided for. No. I look upon it as a pursuit which is in its nature more or less unsettled, and therefore suited to my temporary condition—I may say, precisely suited’” (Dickens 343). Obviously, Richard does not successfully terminate his involvement in Chancery since he dies. His death from his addiction illustrates that he loses his self-control because he succumbs to his addiction. Chancery as an agency of addiction demonstrates the power of the institution because it is able to affect characters in such intimate settings. It manipulates Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard in ways that endanger their well-being in order to take all of their possessions.

Dickens solidifies the image of Chancery as an addictive substance by presenting some of the biological aspects of addiction. He does this mainly by depicting the suitors as predisposed to Chancery addiction—the characters inherit the cases, sometimes over generations of family members. This inheritance functions similarly to a genetic predisposition to addiction because it remains with the family that the case affects and continues down the family line. The Jarndyce

and Jarndyce case is the best example of the Chancery addiction. Multiple generations of characters have been born into the case, married into the case, and died before judgment. As a consequence of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, “Scores of persons have deliriously found themselves made parties in [it] without knowing how or why; whole families have inherited legendary hatreds with the suit” (Dickens 13). The characters who are parties of Jarndyce and Jarndyce cannot choose to avoid the suit—they are predisposed to be a part of it by their familial identity. Richard tells Esther that he suffers from Jarndyce and Jarndyce for this reason: “I was born into this unfinished contention with all its chances and changes, and it began to unsettle me before I quite knew the difference between a suit at law and a suit of clothes; and it has gone on unsettling me ever since” (Dickens 342). Dickens indicates that the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit has a dreadful history; one where the people who think about the case are “insensibly tempted into a loose way of letting bad things alone to take their own bad course, and a loose belief that if the world would go wrong it was in some off-hand manner never meant to go right” (14). In spite of the ill effects of the Court of Chancery, characters habitually engage in its judicial procedure because they are under the influence of the system.

In order to fully capture the nature of Chancery addiction, Dickens examines how the addicted suitors interact with each other. He presents a small community of Chancery junkies, which contains Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard. Together they attend court regularly and then do their own legal research. Miss Flite even describes their group as a “Ve-ry friendly little party” (Dickens 852). They have formed such a strong bond that Miss Flite wants Gridley and Richard to be the executors of her will; however, she makes Richard the sole executor because Gridley starts to deteriorate. She says, “I did at one time mean . . . to nominate, constitute, and appoint poor Gridley. Also very regular, my charming girl. I assure you, most exemplary! But he

wore out, poor man, so I have appointed his successor” (Dickens 853). Miss Flite claims that she believes that Richard will be a good executor for her will because he can watch for her case’s settlement if she dies beforehand. She declares, “I have reflected that if I should wear out, he will be able to watch that judgment. Being so very regular in his attendance” (Dickens 852). Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard form a group in order to establish their identities as suitors in Chancery. Regardless of the trauma they endure from the courts, they attend the judicial proceedings and become well known throughout the Court of Chancery. They support each other in their group, as most other characters attempt to avoid Chancery. However, their small community proves to be dangerous because it reinforces their addictive behavior. They look to each other for another Chancery “high” and maintain an atmosphere where addiction to Chancery is the norm. Because Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard regularly participate in Chancery’s proceedings, they increase their cravings. Thus, the more exposure to Chancery they experience, the more likely they are to continue to crave it (American 483). This small group of addicts eventually dies out, only leaving Miss Flite, because the addiction to Chancery proves to be too powerful for them to overcome. Chancery as an agent of addiction proves to be essential to its social predation because the addiction gives Chancery control over its suitors, especially this group of Chancery junkies. Since Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard are addicts of Chancery, they are willing to give up all of their belongings to get their “fixes.” This allows for Chancery to take their possessions and to have lifetime suitors, both which keep Chancery functioning. Also, when Gridley dies from his addiction, his suit is furthered delayed, giving Chancery the opportunity to take more resources from the other parties in his suit. Ultimately, Chancery uses addiction to manipulate its suitors to make them life-long parties.

Gridley is one of the notable addicts who becomes preoccupied with the Chancery system. Like the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case, Gridley's suit has lasted for a long time. In fact, Gridley claims that it has "dragged for five-and-twenty years" (Dickens 230). Because his suit has lasted for so long, he is the subject of several jokes, particularly the one that identifies him as "the man from Shropshire" (Dickens 230). He acknowledges that the Court of Chancery has an enormous amount of power over him, as he has been "dragged . . . over burning iron" (Dickens 230). Due to Chancery's control over him, Gridley loses the potential to do great things, such as utilizing his energy to become a great general or expressing his passionate oratory as a politician (Dickens 233). Instead, he spends all of his time, attention, and energy on his suit, which inhibits him from functioning to the height of his capacity. Moreover, his physical appearance alters to manifest the stresses that he has experienced in the Court of Chancery. Esther portrays him as "a tall sallow man, with a careworn head, on which but little hair remained, a deeply-lined face, and prominent eyes" (Dickens 225). His jaundice indicates that he is ill, possibly from liver failure, which is a common symptom for addicts, and his aged appearance shows that he has endured a lot of anxiety from his long suit. In consequence of his experience with Chancery, Gridley's volatile temper becomes his defining characteristic. He drastically expresses his emotions in order to fight the Chancery system. Gridley claims, "It is only by resenting [the Court of Chancery], and by revenging them in my mind, and by angrily demanding the justice I never get, that I am able to keep my wits together. It is only that!" (Dickens 230). The Court of Chancery frustrates Gridley, so he responds with violent and raging behavior. He uses aggressive methods to oppose Chancery, such as threatening lawyers (Dickens 231). Although Gridley believes that he is fighting a system of injustice, he actually becomes infatuated with his case. Gridley becomes addicted to Chancery because he spends a lot of time, over 25 years' worth, in Chancery

seeking a resolution (American 541, 543). For instance, when Esther first meets Gridley, she observes that “He had a pen in his hand, and, in the glimpse I caught of his room in passing, I saw that it was covered with a litter of papers” (Dickens 225). Chancery eventually wins the battle when Gridley dies from exhaustion. Gridley admits to losing to Chancery: ““But I am worn out. How long I have been wearing out, I don’t know; I seemed to break down in an hour. I hope [the Court of Chancery] may never come to hear of it”” (Dickens 372). His addiction to Chancery is ultimately what kills him because he allows for the addiction to have complete control over his life.

Miss Flite is another character who is addicted to the Court of Chancery. She confesses to Esther that she is an addict, yet she has no intention of withdrawing from Chancery:

‘Would it not be wiser,’ said I, ‘to expect this Judgment no more?’

‘Why, my dear,’ she answered promptly, ‘of course it would!’

‘And to attend the court no more?’

‘Equally of course,’ said she. ‘Very wearing to be always in expectation of what never comes, my dear Fitz Jarndyce! Wearing, I assure you, to the bone!’ She slightly showed me her arm, and it was fearfully thin indeed.

‘But, my dear,’ she went on, in her mysterious way, ‘there’s a dreadful attraction in the place. Hush! Don’t mention it to our diminutive friend, when she comes in. Or it may frighten her. With good reason. There’s a cruel attraction in the place.

You can’t leave it. And you must expect.’ (Dickens 523)

Miss Flite observes that Chancery has a dreadful attraction that is too strong to break. Since Miss Flite refuses to give up her addiction to Chancery, she habitually attends court to await her judgment, where she admits, “I have the honor to attend court regularly. With my documents. I

expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. . .” (Dickens 43). She attends court so often that Esther refers to it as her “domain” (Dickens 366). Miss Flite’s fascination with the Court of Chancery indicates that, like an addict, she does not devote enough attention to herself because she needs the “fix” of constant court attendance. For instance, she lives in poverty because she sacrifices what little money she does have to feed her addiction. She lacks the adequate resources such as food, coal, and clothes to maintain her health, which Esther observes on her visit to Miss Flite’s living quarters: “There were neither coals nor ashes in the grate, and I saw no articles of clothing anywhere, nor any kind of food” (Dickens 65). Like a typical addict, Miss Flite’s life depends upon satisfying her craving for Chancery procedure. Her addiction to Chancery is severe enough that she admits that she suffers from insomnia because she obsesses over Chancery. She confesses, “I find the nights long, for I sleep but little, and think much. That is, of course, unavoidable; being in Chancery” (Dickens 66). Also similar to a typical addict, Miss Flite has the false idea that she has control over her disease. She insists that she will improve her lifestyle once she receives her judgment from the court. She says, “I expect a judgment shortly, and shall then place my establishment on a superior footing” (Dickens 65). However, Miss Flite never improves her situation. She continues to stalk the Court of Chancery until the end of the novel.

The last person to belong to the small group of Chancery junkies is Richard. Richard’s involvement in Chancery begins while he is young since he is a ward of Chancery and is born into the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case. John Jarndyce explains to Esther that “Jarndyce and Jarndyce was the curtain of Rick’s cradle” (Dickens 517). Richard’s early exposure to the Court of Chancery makes him more susceptible to developing his addiction to it. He uses addictive diction when he describes his interaction with the Chancery, such as when he tells Esther: “I

fancy I have had enough of it. Having worked at Jarndyce and Jarndyce like a galley slave, I have slaked my thirst for the law, and satisfied myself that I shouldn't like it. Besides, I find it unsettles me more and more to be so constantly upon the scene of action” (Dickens 342).

Richard's reference to himself as a galley slave suggests that the Chancery subjugates him to its whim. He contends that at one point he craved the law, but he no longer does. He believes that his thirst for Chancery is temporary; however, this false notion of a temporary “fix” among addicts is quite common (American 541). In spite of his erroneous sense of control, Richard frequently engages with the Court of Chancery because he maintains some level of hope that the Chancery will settle his suit. Esther notes the harmful effect that his persistence in the court creates:

His hopefulness had long been more painful to me than his despondency; it was so unlike hopefulness, had something so fierce in its determination to be it, was so hungry and eager, and yet so conscious of being forced and unsustainable, that it had long touched me to the heart. But the commentary upon it now indelibly written in his handsome face, made it far more distressing than it used to be. I say indelibly; for I felt persuaded that if the fatal cause could have been for ever terminated, according to his brightest visions, in that same hour, the traces of the premature anxiety, self-reproach, and disappointment it had occasioned him, would have remained upon his features to the hour of his death. (Dickens 725)

Since Richard is addicted to Chancery, he lacks the control to stop his interaction with the court. John Jarndyce tells Esther that Richard is not at fault since Chancery produces this same effect on other characters. He says, ““ But again, I say, with all my soul, we must be patient with poor Rick, and not blame him”” (Dickens 517). Richard's addiction to Chancery is exacerbated to

such an extent that he rationalizes his need for his addiction. We see that “Jarndyce and Jarndyce had obtained such possession of his whole nature, that it was impossible to place any consideration before him which he did not—with a distorted kind of reason—make a new argument in favor of his doing what he did” (Dickens 619). Richard has no control over his addiction because his focus is solely on Jarndyce and Jarndyce. He disregards everything not related to Jarndyce and Jarndyce, including his health and appearance. Woodcourt discerns that Richard looks worn down from the stress of his addiction when he tells Esther: “It is not . . . his being so much younger or older, or thinner or fatter, or paler or ruddier, as there being upon his face such a singular expression. I never saw so remarkable a look in a young person. One cannot say that it is all anxiety, or all weariness; yet it is both, and like ungrown despair” (Dickens 652). The more severe his addiction becomes, the more Richard mistrusts others. John Jarndyce points out that Richard is paranoid that he will stop Richard’s pursuits since they are different parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce. He states, “Rick mistrusts and suspects me—goes to lawyers, and is taught to mistrust and suspect me. Hears I have conflicting interests; claims clashing against his, and what not” (Dickens 517). Richard’s anxiety skyrockets as a consequence and he acquires behaviors such as “biting his nails” and acting with impatience (Dickens 851, 856). He eventually exhausts himself “into a lethargy of mind and body that alarmed us greatly,” which leads to his death (Dickens 865). Richard overcomes his addiction on his deathbed once Chancery resolves Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which is a little too late.

Because Chancery’s primary motive is to stay in operation, it focuses its attention on schemes to increase its longevity, such as fees for long suits and other legal expenses. In consequence of Chancery’s predation, it fails to take responsibility for the well-being of the suitors. It then establishes a psychological stronghold over characters, forcing them to be

addicted to the system, while maintaining an emotional distance. Because the by-products of Chancery's predation are both physiological and mental illnesses, the suitors rapidly deteriorate. This rapid deterioration demonstrates that Chancery's multifaceted scheming attacks characters in their most vulnerable aspects. Thus, in spite of its antiquated precedence, Chancery conquers its prey, the most dangerous game—humans.

Chapter 3: Chancery's Lack of Transparency

“Well may the court be dim, with wasting candles here and there; well may the fog hang heavy in it, as if it would never get out; well may the stained glass windows lose their color, and admit no light of day into the place; well may the uninitiated from the streets, who peep in through the glass panes in the door, be deterred from entrance by its owlish aspect, and by the drawl languidly echoing to the roof from the padded dais where the Lord High Chancellor looks into the lantern that has no light in it, and where the attendant wigs are all stuck in a fog-bank!” (Dickens 12)

The second consequence of Chancery's social predation is the lack of transparency in the Chancery system. Like a predator, Chancery prohibits characters from understanding its method of predation, as it is a multifaceted legal system. Dickens uses the images of fog and mud to describe Chancery's inscrutability and corruption, since both pollute and blind characters. Dickens also looks to other images that indicate Chancery's lack of transparency such as the mountains of paperwork that cover the floor of the court, the attire of the judges that hides their identities and accountability, and Krook's congested shop that serves as a microcosm of Chancery. Those whom Dickens associates with Chancery most notably Krook and Tulkinghorn—behave in ways that parallel Chancery's inscrutability because they want their intentions to be unknown to their clients, their prey. Chancery's inscrutability as a system is the second effect of Chancery's predation, as it is too complex for characters to understand and thus stop or escape. This inscrutability takes two forms—Chancery hidden physically, and also the enigmatic behaviors of Tulkinghorn and Krook mirror Chancery's lack of transparency.

Since Chancery is a predator, it hides behind physical elements such as fog in order to remain invisible to its prey. This gives Chancery to opportunity inhibit the characters' visibility in the court and create confusion. The fog and mud obscure the actual view of Chancery, making it difficult for suitors to see its structures. Dickens describes how the fog grows throughout Chancery Lane in the beginning of *Bleak House*:

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wands; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds. (11)

The fog is a proliferating force because it stretches through the entire realm of the city. It moves slowly by creeping and lurking in the city until it gradually integrates itself into some of the most intimate settings, such as the lungs of Greenwich pensioners. Dickens suggests that the metaphorical source of the fog is in the Court of Chancery, wherein “hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln’s Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery” (11). This fog around the Lord Chancellor suggests that he is in the center of an impaired system—one where everyone is blind. Because the fog hinders visibility, it creates a state of inertia for Chancery. For instance, the fog exacerbates the already languid Court of Chancery:

On such an afternoon, if ever, the Lord High Chancellor ought to be sitting here—as here he is—with a foggy glory round his head, softly fenced in with crimson

cloth and curtains . . . and outwardly directing his contemplation to the lantern in the roof, where he can see nothing but fog. On such an afternoon, some score of members of the High Court of Chancery . . . mistily engaged in one of ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents. . . (Dickens 11)

Here, Dickens uses the fog to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the Court of Chancery. His choice of words such as “softly,” “curtains,” “mistily,” “endless,” “tripping,” and “slippery” indicates the lack of transparency in the legal system since no one can clearly see what the legal process entails. The fog also pollutes everything that it touches. Therefore, it becomes an adequate symbol for the Court of Chancery. Blinded by its own mountain of procedure, the Court of Chancery has become bogged down by precedence. Similar to the Chancery system, the fog is a combination of various pollutants, which create a dangerous overarching force. Scholar Edgar Johnson argues that the fog has two functions because “The fog of the opening chapter is both literal and allegorical. It is the sooty London fog, but it covers all England, and it is the fog of obstructive procedures and outmoded institutions and selfish interests [and] obscured thinking as well” (22). Because Chancery is a powerful institution, its precedence spreads and covers the English society just as the fog does. Chancery’s antiquated precedence inhibits efficiency of living and blinds characters to justice since it preys on suitors. In this regard, Chancery benefits from the fog because the fog allows for the system to continue in obscurity, preying on those victims it is supposed to be helping.

Dickens also uses the mud to show Chancery’s lack of clarity. Similar to the fog, the mud blocks any clear view of Chancery, as it is heavily concentrated around the court, where “The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest,

near the leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation: Temple Bar” (Dickens 11). The mud, a sticky and thick substance, both transfers filth and thwarts efficient movement. The characters who walk in the mud near Chancery Lane wet their garments and slip. Dickens describes the “Foot passengers . . . losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if the day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest” (11). The mud continues to gather along the streets, creating even more of a mess for the characters to waddle through. It also removes the identity from the individuals whom it splatters because they all look dirty. For instance, the third-person omniscient narrator describes: “Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers” (Dickens 11). By covering everything, the mud removes the distinction between animals and people. Thus, it is an equalizing factor because it affects everyone. Scholar Jeremy Hawthorn explains that “mud and fog, both dirty, unpleasant things, the products of, in the main, horse excrement and coal smoke in the London of Dickens’s time. But also . . . as the opening of the novel indicates, no one can escape from either. Whether you are a prince or pauper, in the London of *Bleak House* you will walk through mud and breathe fog into your lungs” (63). Dickens links the mud from Chancery Lane to the depravity of the legal system when he writes, “Never can there come fog too quick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth” (11). Dickens links Chancery to a slippery and dirty substance through his various images of mud. The mud functions as a mechanism for Chancery to benefit from, which creates a sense of instability and perversion

because mud does not provide support and is filthy. It is slippery, creating instability among those who come into contact with it and it is a combination of several disgusting things. As mud slowly sloshes around, Chancery slowly sloshes in its procedure with no sort of direction. Also, as mud soils everything it contacts, Chancery soils the lives of the suitors through its predation.

Another physical element that both blinds and blocks efficiency and hence allows those in Chancery to take advantage of its suitors is the overwhelming amounts of paperwork that fill up the inside of the court. As a legal system, Chancery has tomes upon tomes of documents. There are so many papers in Chancery that “some of [the attorneys] jocosely proposed to read huge volumes of affidavits” (Dickens 366). The legal documents in Chancery lie in colossal piles “with bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters’ reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them” (Dickens 12). The papers are physical impediments to the attorneys because they lie in bundles at their feet, “Below the table, again, was a long row of solicitors, with bundles of papers on the matting at their feet” (Dickens 365). The large amount of paperwork in the Chancery systems indicates that the system is clogged with information. Yet, because there is so much paperwork, no one can read all of it. Therefore, no one knows exactly what is happening, which creates an idle environment in the court, where “The Lord Chancellor leaned back in his very easy chair, with his elbow on the cushioned arm, and his forehead resting on his hand; some of those who were present, dozed; some read the newspapers; some walked about, or whispered in groups; all seemed perfectly at their ease, by no means in a hurry, very unconcerned, and extremely comfortable” (Dickens 365). Because Chancery does not properly utilize its legal documents, it becomes a system of ignorance. This ignorance delays suits because the court cannot function efficiently, which hurts the suitors who have to be involved with the lengthy and expensive cases. Chancery benefits

from this lack of efficiency because it uses the lengthy suits to increase its revenues from the procedural fees. Thus, this lack of efficiency becomes an advantage for Chancery's social predation.

Dickens presents one last physical impediment in Chancery that reflects its inscrutability—the ridiculous court attire of the Chancery officials. The costumes of the Chancellors physically mask the individuals in Chancery, removing their identities as people. Dickens notes that the costumes distinguish those who work in the legal profession. Esther witnesses this when she attends court and observes, “I counted twenty-three gentlemen in wigs, who said they were ‘in it;’ and none of them appeared to understand it much better than I” (Dickens 366). Although the legal attire helps identify the individuals who work in the Court of Chancery, the clothing also functions to hide the individuals who make the judgments. People who are not within the Chancery system struggle to recognize the Chancery officials without all of their superfluous clothing:

There is only one Judge in town. Even he only comes twice a-week to sit in chambers. If the country folks of those assize towns on his circuit could only see him now! No full-bottomed wig, no red petticoats, no fur, no javelin-men, no white wands. Merely a close-shaved gentleman in white trousers and a white hat, with sea-bronze on the judicial countenance, and a strip of bark peeled by the solar rays from the judicial nose, who calls in at the shell-fish shop as he comes along, and drinks iced ginger-beer! (Dickens 278)

By wearing their legal attire, the lawyers and chancellors avoid accountability. They are disguised in their full-bottomed wigs and robes because no one will recognize them without their legal attire. This allows for Chancery officials to be deceptive since the suitors cannot identify

them in their normal appearance. Due to the legal attire, Chancery officials can prey upon the suitors without worrying about counterattacks. As a result, the court attire acts as a mechanism of predation for Chancery where officials can prevent suitors from identifying who exactly is in the system, let alone who is taking advantage of them.

Because Chancery benefits from these kinds of physical elements to hinder any insight to how the system functions, it blocks the clarity of the system for those who work in it as well. Chancery at this point functions on its own accord and has surpassed human control, making it the ultimate social predator that no one can stop. The Chancery system is inscrutable because no one, not those who work within it, can understand it. The Court of Chancery is incomprehensible to the characters because its procedure is complex. Esther comments on how the attorneys do not understand the aspects of the bill of costs when she visits court: “[Chancery officials] chatted about it with the Lord Chancellor, and contradicted and explained among themselves, and some of them said it was this way, and some of them said it was that way” (Dickens 366). Chancery’s ignorance of its procedure is intentional, especially during aftermath of Krook’s death. Dickens explains that “The less the court understands of all this, the more the court likes it; and the greater enjoyment it has in the stock in trade of the Sol’s Arms” (490). The court benefits from its ignorance since its ignorance inhibits efficiency. Because the chancellors and lawyers do not understand the Court of Chancery, their forms of justice are perplexing. Miss Flite admits that she struggles to understand Chancery’s judgments, despite her habitual attendance of the courts. She says, “Chancery justice is so ve-ry difficult to follow” (Dickens 60). Because the characters do not understand the Chancery system, they cannot agree on anything, making the system even more inefficient. Consequently, the lawyers and chancellors are oblivious to the suitors and their cases, despite the fact that most of the cases last for a long

time. Dickens describes, “Another ruined suitor, who periodically appears from Shropshire and breaks out into efforts to address the Chancellor at the close of the day's business and who can by no means be made to understand that the Chancellor is legally ignorant of his existence after making it desolate for a quarter of a century” (13). Chancery is ignorant of its own institution and suitors because it has developed into a large system. This system is too large to function effectively, as it is constipated with mountains of precedence. Old ideas build upon older ideas in an antiquated institution, creating confusion for those who work in Chancery. However, this confusion of those in Chancery benefits the system because Chancery officials cannot stop the system from functioning. The system appears to operate on its own since Chancery officials do not understand how it works.

Similar to the Court of Chancery, Krook's shop is disorganized and it functions as a microcosm of the lack of transparency of Chancery. His shop is clogged and congested with miscellaneous and mysterious items. For instance, in his windows he has several “quantities of dirty bottles— blacking bottles, medicine bottles, ginger-beer and soda-water bottles, pickle bottles, wine bottles, ink bottles. . . There were a great many ink bottles” (Dickens 62). The ink bottles in particular are remnants of the Chancery system, and they reveal the arduous labor that goes into copying the legal documents. Krook's shop also contains “all the rusty keys, of which there must have been hundreds huddled together as old iron, had once belonged to doors or rooms or strong chests in lawyers' offices” (Dickens 62). Keys, which open locked doors to reveal what is beyond the doors, lie together unused. The unused keys symbolize Chancery's refusal to unlock the barriers that would reveal answers. They reinforce the uncertainty of the legal system, of which scholar Alice Van Buren Kelly argues: “The keys to Mr. Tulkinghorn's locked secrets and to all the confusion of court cases lie lost in Krook's shop with no locks to

open. As in Chancery, no two parts of the same puzzle are allowed anywhere near each other for fear that the picture might suddenly be fitted together and the puzzle solved” (263). Together with the congestion of items and unused keys, Krook’s shop lacks transparency. It also is restricted since there are so many things and the doors are locked. Also similar to Chancery, Krook’s shop becomes an easy place to trap suitors. The suitors have little means of escaping as there is barely room to move around, which benefits Krook the predator.

Dickens further develops the sense that Krook’s shop is a microcosm of Chancery when he recounts the paperwork that Krook hoards. The paper is in large bundles, which Dickens writes, lie “A little way within the shop door . . . [There are] heaps of old crackled parchment scrolls, and discolored and dog’s-eared law-papers” (62). From this description, the parchment in Krook’s shop appears to be discolored from age and neglect. Krook has so much paper and items in general in his shop that the residents of Chancery Lane call him Lord Chancellor, a metaphorical acknowledgment of his hoarding:

‘It’s true enough,’ he said, going before us with the lantern, ‘that they call me the Lord Chancellor, and call my shop Chancery. And why do you think they call me the Lord Chancellor, and my shop Chancery? . . . You see I have so many things here,’ he resumed, holding up the lantern, ‘of so many kinds, and all, as the neighbours think (but they know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that’s why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all’s fish that comes to my net. And I can’t abear to part with anything I once lay hold of (or so my neighbours think, but what do they know?) or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning,

nor repairing going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery.' (Dickens 62-63)

Krook's hoarding makes his shop dirty because he has too much stuff. As his paper and miscellaneous objects accumulate, dirt and dust accrue, causing those who attempt to examine his shop, such as the Smallweeds, to become unclean. While searching through Krook's shop, they "are blackened with dust and dirt, and present a fiendish appearance not relieved by the general aspect of the room. There is more litter and lumber in it than of old, and it is dirtier if possible; likewise, it is ghostly with traces of its dead inhabitant, and even with his chalked writing on the wall" (Dickens 585-586). The dirt and dust also make Krook's shop physically dark, which the Smallweeds "can at first see nothing save darkness and shadows" (Dickens 585). The characters cannot see and distinguish what lies before them in Krook's shop. In this respect, Krook's shop resembles a cave because the characters can only see darkness and shadows, which causes them to be more susceptible to Krook's predation. Therefore, Krook can use the darkness to trap his prey, which resembles Chancery's methods of benefiting from fog and mud.

Krook's secretive motives relate to the lack of transparency of the Chancery system. He is a character with a mysterious disposition. Guppy remarks that he has a difficult time interpreting Krook's motivations since he is "' an old card as this; so deep, so sly, and secret (though I don't believe he is ever sober)'" (Dickens 301). One example of Krook's mysterious behaviors is his penchant for collecting documents even though he is illiterate. Krook memorizes the shapes of the letters as Jobling observes: "'He is always spelling out words from them, and chalking them over the table and the shop-wall, and asking what this is, and what that is'" (Dickens 475). Jobling speculates that Krook's "'whole stock, from beginning to end, may easily be the waste paper he bought it as, for anything I can say. It's a monomania with him, to

think he is possessed of documents. He has been going to learn to read them this last quarter of a century, I should judge, from what he tells me” (Dickens 475). Krook’s behavior suggests that the Chancery system is inscrutable even to those predators who live off of it. Krook’s illiteracy makes him incapable of engaging in an essential part of legal procedure—reading the records of the cases. Thus, he remains ignorant of this significant component in Chancery procedure and wastes time collecting monstrous amounts of legal papers. His illiteracy also suggests that he is inefficient like Chancery. Krook claims that he has wanted to learn how to read for years, yet he does not actively learn how to read. Similar to Chancery, he is slow and inefficient.

In addition to Krook, Dickens also portrays Tulkinghorn as another representative of Chancery whose behavior mimics the court’s inscrutability. In *Bleak House*, Tulkinghorn is the embodiment of secrecy because his general demeanor presents a façade to the other characters. Dickens describes him as “An Oyster of the old school, whom nobody can open” (146). This image of Tulkinghorn as an oyster implies that he maintains a façade over his true personality—one that is hardened with age and seemingly impossible to open. Tulkinghorn is cool, calm, and collected throughout the novel. He does not reveal any of his emotions, which causes him to be even more enigmatic since he “wears his usual expressionless mask—if it be a mask—and carries family secrets in every limb of his body, and every crease of his dress” (Dickens 175). As he refuses to reveal his sentiments, Tulkinghorn is “sedately satisfied” (Dickens 602). Due to his reticent persona, Tulkinghorn distances himself from others. He prefers to work alone, as most predators prefer to do. Working alone enables him to scheme plans of control over other characters, so “He keeps no staff; only one middle-aged man, usually a little out at elbows, who sits in a high Pew in the hall, and is rarely overburdened with business. Tulkinghorn is not in a common way. He wants no clerks. He is a great reservoir of confidences, not to be so tapped. His

clients want him; he is all in all” (Dickens 146). Because Tulkinghorn has no additional workers, he does most of his own legal work. He remains in control over his work and can keep everything a secret. This adds to his predation since like Chancery he prevents his clients from understanding his methods. He is also able to attract clients in spite of his secretive nature. This indicates that he lures his prey to him by dangling Chancery’s illusion of justice.

Although Tulkinghorn refuses to display anything personal about himself, he yearns to accumulate the secrets of others. Lady Dedlock speculates that Tulkinghorn desires to obtain others’ secrets because he can use the secrets to blackmail the other characters. She believes that “His calling is the acquisition of secrets, and the holding possession of such power as they give him, with no sharer or opponent in it” (Dickens 536). Tulkinghorn targets certain characters—mainly Lady Dedlock—for blackmail. His relationship with Lady Dedlock is one that is based on secrets. A significant part of their communication is unspoken, as they rely upon nonverbal cues to understand each other. The third-person omniscient narrator observes: “But, whether each evermore watches and suspects the other, evermore mistrustful of some great reservation; whether each is evermore prepared at all points for the other, and never to be taken unawares; what each would give to know how much the other knows—all this is hidden, for the time, in their own hearts” (Dickens 178). Tulkinghorn wants to control Lady Dedlock by threatening to expose her secret to Sir Leicester. He tells her that Sir Leicester is his primary concern, although the reader can sense that he has alternative motives: “I might have known it, from what I have seen of your strength of character. I ought not to have asked the question, but I have the habit of making sure of my ground, step by step, as I go on. The sole consideration in this unhappy case is Sir Leicester” (Dickens 607). Therefore, Tulkinghorn strategically acts as he would normally—calm and collected—in order to keep his scheme a secret to Lady Dedlock and

everyone else. He acts normally as he “stands before her, with one hand on a chair-back and the other in his old-fashioned waistcoat and shirt-frill, exactly as he has stood before her at any time since her marriage. The same formal politeness, the same composed deference that might as well be defiance; the whole man the same dark, cold object, at the same distance, which nothing has ever diminished” (Dickens 604). Since Lady Dedlock is unable to determine Tulkinghorn’s motives, it is more difficult for her to overcome his influence over her. She cannot combat Tulkinghorn because only he knows of his strategy. He clouds her life with unknown intentions that have “Interposed between her and the fading light of day in the now quiet street, his shadow falls upon her, and he darkens all before her. Even so does he darken her life” (Dickens 681). Tulkinghorn’s shadow over Lady Dedlock is both literal and metaphorical since he is so close to her physically and threatens to expose her. His method of keeping his intentions unknown demonstrates that he is a predator because he prevents his prey, Lady Dedlock, from learning his strategy, so that she cannot counterattack. This way, Tulkinghorn obtains complete control over Lady Dedlock. Tulkinghorn does seem to aim to destroy her—to drive her to her own doom—and he succeeds.

In addition to Tulkinghorn’s mysterious intentions, his room further demonstrates the lack of transparency in the Court of Chancery. Tulkinghorn’s room is dark because it is “attended by two candles in old-fashioned silver candlesticks, that give a very insufficient light to his large room” (Dickens 146). Similar to Krook’s shop, this darkness in Tulkinghorn’s room prevents light from entering, which decreases visibility. Therefore, it becomes difficult for the characters who enter to decipher how the room looks. Besides the darkness, dust from Tulkinghorn’s window “lies thick everywhere” to cover what is in his office (Dickens 325). Tulkinghorn uses the dust in a metaphorical sense to blind those outside of Chancery. Dickens

writes, “When a breeze from the country that has lost its way, takes fright, and makes a blind hurry to rush out again, it flings as much dust in the eyes of Allegory as the law—or Mr. Tulkinghorn, one of its trustiest representatives—may scatter, on occasion, in the eyes of the laity” (325). The dust becomes a mechanism for the legal world to block the view of justice. As a predator, Tulkinghorn can blind the suitors with his dust in order to cause confusion, which explains why “Both Tulkinghorn and Vholes, lawyers and animals of prey, have a particular liking to dust” (Deen 49). Tulkinghorn uses the dust to cover the true identity of objects, which obstructs client’s visibility in his office. Like Chancery, he is able to use this visual obstruction to trap his clients because they cannot properly see. The dust in Tulkinghorn’s office also illustrates the inertia of the legal world. Because his office collects dust, we can deduce that Tulkinghorn does not utilize his office much. Rather, he leaves everything alone and lets the wind blow dust into his office. Like Chancery, Tulkinghorn’s room lacks clarity, which makes it an environment characterized by the confusion that aids predators in gaining the advantage over their prey.

Through its predation, Chancery becomes an institution that lacks transparency. It creates inscrutable environments that none of the characters—even those in Chancery itself—can fathom. Dickens portrays Chancery as a system that is out of control because none of the characters can fully comprehend it. In this regard, Chancery as an institution appears to possess more power than the people who run it, despite the fact that it is intentionally ignorant. In this regard, Chancery becomes the ultimate predator because it seems impossible to stop with the archaic precedence building up. For Dickens, Chancery does not find truth and justice. Rather, it is a system of superficiality with its real focus on taking away resources from its suitors.

Chapter 4: Chancery the Bad Parent

“The Lord High Chancellor, at his best, appeared so poor a substitute for the love and pride of parents.” (Dickens 39)

The final consequence of Chancery’s social predation comes through its role as a bad parent to the wards of Chancery. Unlike a good parent, the Court of Chancery does not care about the well-being of its wards. Rather, it disregards its wards because its focus lies on obtaining time, money, and life from the suitors so it can continue to function, as well as keeping those resources within the system. As a result, the Court of Chancery deprives its wards of necessities such as a proper living environment, an education, food, and life. This deprivation retards any social movement of the wards, so they remain in the same restricted socioeconomic status that benefits the court itself. As a result of Chancery’s predation, Chancery becomes a bad parental figure for its wards since it neglects their welfare. Chancery’s neglect forces the wards to live in poverty, as it refuses to use any of its resources to care for the wards.

Though technically not a ward, Jo lives under the influence of the Court of Chancery. His home in Tom-all-alone’s, a property of Chancery, debilitates him in various ways. Since Tom-all-alone’s is place full of disease and poverty, Jo becomes contaminated with its filth, and he starves. As Tom-all-alone’s is notorious for its pollution, the toxins of Tom-all-alone’s become its main feature. This means that Tom-all-alone’s disease and contamination are “homely” qualities for Jo, which Dickens describes: “Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him” (668). Dickens uses the word *homely* ironically to suggest the innate corruption of Chancery’s influence over Tom-all-alone’s. These “homely” images describing Jo demonstrate that Chancery deserts its parental duty to care for those who rely on its guardianship. Rather, those who live in Tom-all-alone’s are exposed to harmful elements in part through Chancery’s neglect of any responsibility that

does not directly feed its selfish interests. Jo's exposure to these "homely" aspects of Tom-all-alone's eventually kills him. Also, since Tom-all-alone's is impoverished, Jo starves, which makes him more prone to illness. Jo's starvation becomes so consistent that his body becomes accustomed to it. He tells Woodcourt: "I thought I was amost a starvin, sir. . . but I don't know nothink—not even that. I don't care for eating wittles nor yet for drinking on em" (Dickens 665). Jo's undernourishment and sickness are ironic, considering that in a prison he would be better fed and receive some medical care. John Jarndyce notes this irony to Esther and Skimpole, when he states, "Now, is it not a horrible reflection. . . that if this wretched creature were a convicted prisoner, his hospital would be wide open to him, and he would be as well taken care of as any sick boy in the kingdom?" (Dickens 455). Because Chancery disregards Jo's welfare, the Court of Chancery appears to be completely incompetent as a guardian. Chancery's carelessness for Jo shows an inconsistency with fairness, as Jo is punished more for being poor than a criminal who would be breaking the law.

In consequence of the poverty in Tom-all-alone's, poverty that arises due to Chancery's negligence, Jo lacks any sort of an education, causing him to be ignorant. For instance, Jo only knows his first name; he cannot even spell it: "Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heard of sich a think. Don't know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for him. He don't find no fault with it. Spell it? No. He can't spell it" (Dickens 162). Jo barely has an identity as he has only one short first name. The third-person omniscient narrator points out that Jo has "No father, no mother, no friends. Never been to school. What's home?" (Dickens 162). Jo's social identity is also almost nonexistent because he cannot base his identity on that of his parents. He also has not been to school, so he has no formal education. The only knowledge that Jo possesses is how to sweep and to be

honest, but he cannot recollect who taught him either of those things, which the third-person omniscient narrator expounds: “Knows a broom’s a broom, and knows it’s wicked to tell a lie. Don’t recollect who told him about the broom, or about the lie, but knows both. Can’t exactly say what’ll be done to him arter he’s dead if he tells a lie to the gentlemen here, but believes it’ll be something wery bad to punish him, and serve him right—and so he’ll tell the truth” (Dickens 162). Jo’s inability to identify himself reflects the poor parenting of the Chancery—he has no knowledge of anything, which makes him more vulnerable. His ignorance also keeps him bound in the realms of the impoverished Tom-all-alone’s because he is incapable of any social mobility. Jo is stuck within the system. Chancery remains in power as a negligent elder whose actions serve only its own ends.

Due to Jo’s lack of education, he is unfamiliar with the characteristics of civilized society. He does not understand any of the intricacies of civilization, such as written language. The third-person omniscient narrator comments, “It must be a strange state to be like Jo! . . . To see people read, and to see people write, and to see the postmen deliver letters, and not to have the least idea of all that language—to be, to every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb!” (Dickens 236). Jo’s illiteracy shows that he cannot fully communicate with other people, nor can he navigate within his own world. Therefore, Chancery isolates him from one major form of communication. Jo becomes a being who lacks the intelligence of a typical human, which causes him to be as ignorant as the animals. Dickens portrays Jo “as a dumb animal, a creature possessed of as little understanding as the sheepdog who stands beside him listening to a passing band” (Pykett 132-133). Yet, Jo is not an animal because he is physically human. He is stuck in the limbo of the living because “[Jo] is not of the same order of things, not of the same place in creation. He is of no order and no place; neither of the beasts, nor of humanity” (Dickens 669).

Jo's inability to be a member of the civilized society reflects the Chancery's role as a terrible parent. Instead of integrating Jo into society, Chancery socially isolates him in Tom-all-alone's. As a result, Jo is stuck in poverty and ignorance. He has nowhere to go and no one to turn to because he is not able to function fully in the civilized society. This gives Chancery an advantage since Jo remains in a stagnant social position. By keeping Jo poor, Chancery reinforces the traditional social hierarchy, which inhibits any social changes that would affect Chancery's position as a powerful legal institution. This way, Jo has no means of fighting the social predation of Chancery because it has deprived him of essential resources.

Chancery's bad parenting is not limited to Jo. The two most prominent wards in *Bleak House*, Richard and Ada, also have to endure the effects of Chancery's bad parenting in the beginning of the novel. The Lord Chancellor shows little interest in Richard's and Ada's well-being when he assigns their guardian to them. First of all, he cannot remember that there are two wards of Chancery since he only refers to Ada. Mr. Tangle corrects him:

‘In reference,’ proceeds the Chancellor, still on Jarndyce and Jarndyce, ‘to the young girl—’

‘Begludship's pardon— boy,’ says Mr. Tangle prematurely.

‘In reference,’ proceeds the Chancellor with extra distinctness, ‘to the young girl and boy, the two young people . . .’ (Dickens 16)

The Lord Chancellor then attempts to appoint two inept guardians—their uncle who is dead and their grandfather who is unwell:

‘[The two wards] Whom I directed to be in attendance to-day and who are now in my private room, I will see them and satisfy myself as to the expediency of making the order for their residing with their uncle.’

Mr. Tangle on his legs again.

‘Begludship's pardon— dead.’

‘With their,’ Chancellor looking through his double eye-glass at the papers on his desk, ‘grandfather.’

‘Begludship's pardon— victim of rash action— brains.’ (Dickens 16)

In this instance, the Lord Chancellor demonstrates that he is apathetic concerning where he places Ada and Richard. He remains emotionally distant from Ada and Richard and only engages in his duty as the Lord Chancellor, which requires a minimal amount of effort on his part. The Lord Chancellor’s behavior “towards Richard and Ada indicates that he [fulfills] the letter of the law, but apart from placing the wards in the care of Jarndyce, who promises to secure their education and maintenance, he shows little interest in their welfare” (Poon 6). The Court of Chancery is a terrible parental figure because it is apathetic about its wards. Instead of caring about the wards’ welfare, the Chancellor risks endangering them by putting them with a terrible guardian. However, the Lord Chancellor’s behavior in this instance helps the system’s social predation because it attempts to stratify the aristocratic social hierarchy, which would hurt Richard’s and Ada’s chances for social mobility. As a result, they would not be able to dismantle Chancery’s status as a traditional legal system.

Richard shares the spot with Jo as the poster child of Chancery’s bad parenting.

Chancery’s influence has been a part of Richard’s life since he was an infant because, as John Jarndyce tells Esther that “‘Jarndyce and Jarndyce was the curtain of Rick’s cradle’” (Dickens 517). As a result of Chancery’s influence over his life, Richard becomes a ne’er-do-well. For instance, he cannot decide what type of career he should have. He continually changes his mind concerning career options, as he confesses to Esther: “‘I fancy I have had enough of [working in

the law]. Having worked at Jarndyce and Jarndyce like a galley slave, I have slaked my thirst for the law, and satisfied myself that I shouldn't like it. . . What is it that I naturally turn my thoughts to. . .but the army!" (Dickens 342-343). Even the Lord Chancellor observes Richard's fickle behavior and refers to him "as a vexatious and capricious infant" (Dickens 357). Due to the lack of any substantial parental influence besides John Jarndyce, Richard's lifestyle is an unsettled one as he is a ward of Chancery. John Jarndyce refers to his situation as a Wiglomeration:

'More Wiglomeration,' said he. 'It's the only name I know for the thing. He is a ward in Chancery, my dear. Kenge and Carboy will have something to say about it; Master Somebody—a sort of ridiculous Sexton, digging graves for the merits of causes in a back room at the end of Quality Court, Chancery Lane—will have something to say about it; Counsel will have something to say about it; the Chancellor will have something to say about it; the Satellites will have something to say about it; they will all have to be handsomely fee'd, all round, about it; the whole thing will be vastly ceremonious, wordy, unsatisfactory, and expensive, and I call it, in general, Wiglomeration. How mankind ever came to be afflicted with Wiglomeration, or for whose sins these young people ever fell into a pit of it, I don't know; so it is.' (Dickens 110-111)

Richard's inability to choose a career parallels the inefficiency of the Court of Chancery. As much as Richard is indecisive about his future, so too does the Court of Chancery make it difficult for him to choose since he has to go through several channels in order for the officials in the court to approve of his decision. Therefore, the Court of Chancery is a bad parent because its constipated procedure prevents Richard from creating a stable life. The Chancery's behavior in this instance demonstrates its bad parenting as a consequence of its predation because the court

averts Richard from any sort of social mobility. His social status spirals downward, especially when he obsesses over Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Chancery uses Richard's infatuation to further impede his social mobility by exploiting him through addiction and costs. By the end of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Richard is impoverished and on his deathbed, as he sacrifices everything he owns, including himself, to settling his suit. He becomes nothing more than another forlorn suitor in the Court of Chancery, who has fed the system's monetary greed through years of seeking a settlement.

Miss Flite is another ward who suffers from the Chancery's ill parenting. She claims that she was a ward of Chancery before she became insane. Miss Flite retorts to Richard after he calls her mad: "'Right! Mad, young gentleman,' [Miss Flite] returned so quickly that [Richard] was quite abashed. 'I was a ward myself. I was not mad at that time,' curtsying low, and smiling between every little sentence'" (Dickens 43). Miss Flite suggests that the Court of Chancery took everything from her and induced her insanity. She explains to Esther, Ada, and Richard: "'I had youth, and hope. I believe, beauty. It matters very little now. Neither of the three served, or saved me. I have the honor to attend court regularly. With my documents. I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment'" (Dickens 43). Unlike a good parental figure, the Court of Chancery manipulates Miss Flite's addictive nature. She claims that Chancery drew her into its clutches after she recovered from her illness, which Chancery allegedly caused. She relates her experience to Esther: "'Then I was ill, and in misery; and heard, as I had often heard before, that this was all the work of Chancery. When I got better, I went to look at the Monster. And then I found out how it was, and I was drawn to stay there'" (Dickens 523). Chancery uses its authority over Miss Flite to control her behavior, so that she habitually interacts with it. The relationship between Miss Flite and the Court of Chancery is exploitative since Chancery attacks Miss Flite's

mental state in order to keep her attending court. The Court of Chancery needs her participation to continue to function. Without Miss Flite, Chancery lacks a suitor who is addicted to Chancery, and thus, willing to invest everything she owns to have her Chancery “high.”

The Neckett children are the last example of characters who endure the ill-effects of Chancery’s depraved parenting. The Neckett children become orphans after their father, the debt collector, dies. Due to their father’s death, the Neckett children live in poverty with no heat and little food, which Esther observes on her visit to the Coavinses Castle: “There was no fire, though the weather was cold; both children were wrapped in some poor shawls and tippetts, as a substitute. Their clothing was not so warm, however, but that their noses looked red and pinched, and their small figures shrunken” (Dickens 225). The eldest child, Charley, takes on the role of the mother due to the absence of a guardian. She works odd jobs to support her family, despite the fact that she resembles a child. Esther notes that Charley seems to resemble a child “playing at washing, and imitating a poor working woman with a quick observation of the truth” (Dickens 225). Similar to Jo, the Neckett children have no parental figures once they become orphans. The Court of Chancery ignores them, and they have to survive without the help of adults, at least for a little while. As a result, the Neckett children “are locked in a cold, barren room, while their adolescent sister takes in washing to support them. Their father, recently dead, has been connected with the Court in a minor capacity, and this connection suggests what is true of all these children: they are wards in Chancery, either as victims of social neglect and commercial hardheartedness” (Spilka 69-70). Without the care and concern of individuals such as John Jarndyce and Esther, the Neckett children would be trapped within the realms of Chancery Lane, and doomed to remain in abject poverty. The Chancery system thus is bad

parent because it makes no attempts to care for the Neckett children. It neglects them, as it does with the rest of its wards because it wants to keep its financial resources for itself.

Chancery's role as a bad parent reflects the selfishness of the legal system. As a predator, Chancery focuses all of its attention in obtaining suitors and their money to keep its system operating, instead of caring for its wards. Chancery's behavior insinuates that it believes that the wards require too much care and money, so it abandons them. The wards struggle in the social Darwinian world, where they live in poverty since they have little means of social advancement. Through Chancery's negligence of its wards, it stratifies the aristocratic hierarchy, making social mobility in general impossible to do, which ensures that Chancery will continue to function in the traditional aristocratic society.

Conclusion

“We asked a gentleman by us, if he knew what cause was on? He told us Jarndyce and Jarndyce. We asked him if he knew what was doing in it? He said, really no he did not, nobody ever did; but as well as he could make out, it was over. Over for the day? we asked him. No, he said; over for good.

Over for good!

When we heard this unaccountable answer, we looked at one another quite lost in amazement. Could it be possible that the Will had set things right at last, and that Richard and Ada were going to be rich? It seemed too good to be true. Alas it was!”
(Dickens 899)

This epigraph of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* notes the beginning of a new life for its parties. As *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* ends, so too does Dickens’s *Court of Chancery*. What was an obstinate legal system corrupted beyond repair ceases to exist. While Chancery’s primary motive for its predation is to keep the system functioning, Chancery, a system of old values and abuses, eventually dies in 1875 during “its incorporation into the Supreme Court of Judicature” (Lobban 389). The system’s exploitive nature dwindles as Chancery’s prey, the suitors, learn how to combat it through reform in the modernization of Victorian England. As time progresses and culture changes, Dickens argues that the social institutions must adapt. This change causes the downfall of Chancery, as it cannot adapt to the modern idea of individuality.

Dickens’s critique of Chancery as a predator demonstrates the lack of morality in the legal system. Chancery has no qualms with exploiting its suitors in order to stay alive, causing it to be an immoral system. Dickens argues that systems in general are societal evils. As a proponent of individual interests in contemporary Victorian England, Dickens examines Chancery as an old institution that reinforces the traditional social hierarchy, where “society sets up against competent and innovative minds” (Levine 254). This old institution of Chancery thwarts human development since it remains stagnant, tied to its outmoded and rigid procedure. As a modern man, Dickens finds the antiquated Chancery to “[produce] a new breed of villain,

ostensibly 'modern,' but by gestures at respectability merely exploiting ancient injustices in pursuit of success for Number One" (Levine 254). The Chancery lawyers are the *Bleak House* villains who cause the suitors to revert back to brutish tendencies in a Social Darwinist setting. Dickens uses *Bleak House* as an opportunity to "reverse the process of formalization, as his novel attempts to remove trust and conscience from their precedent-based meanings in Equity, and restore them to their original meaning as moral virtues which maintain standards of conscionable conduct in society" (Poon 5). He endeavors to separate Chancery from morality to demonstrate that Chancery harms Victorian society. In this case, Victorian society seems to be ahead of the archaic Chancery.

This is Dickens's Court of Chancery, an institution of a predatory nature and a representative of the old values that, thanks in part to Dickens, is on its way out.

Bibliography

- American Psychological Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th ed. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2013. Print.
- Begon, Michael, Colin R. Townsend, and John L. Harper. *Ecology: From Individuals to Ecosystems*. 4th ed. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. *Google Books*. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.
- Buzard, James. "'Anywhere's Nowhere': *Bleak House* as Autoethnography." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12.1 (1999): n.pag. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.
- Crompton, Louis. "Satire and Symbolism in *Bleak House*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 12.4 (1958): 284-303. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.
- Deen, Leonard W. "Style and Unity in *Bleak House*." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Bleak House*. Ed. Jacob Korg. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. 45-57. Print.
- Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. Ed. Stephen Gill. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. E-book.
- Donovan, Robert. "Structure and Idea in *Bleak House*." *EHL* 29.2 (1962): 175-201. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 Sept. 2013.
- Eighner, Lars. "On Orwell on Dickens." *The Threepenny Review* 56 (1994): 12-13. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Nov. 2013.
- Garis, Robert E. "From *The Dickens Theatre*." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Bleak House*. Ed. Jacob Korg. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. 88-101. Print.
- Gill, Stephen, ed. *Bleak House*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. E-book.
- Godfray, H.C.J. *Parasitoids: Behavioral and Evolutionary Ecology*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994. *Google Books*. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.
- Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*. New York, NY: The New American Library, 1963. Print.
- Harvey, W.J. "Chance and Design in *Bleak House*." *Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Martin Prince. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967. 135-146. Print.
- Hawthorn, Jeremy. *Bleak House*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1987. Print.
- Johnson, Edgar. "The Anatomy of Society." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Bleak House*. Ed. Jacob Korg. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. 21-30. Print.

- Julius, Anthony. "Dickens the Lawbreaker." *Critical Quarterly* 40.3 (1998): 43-66. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 24 Nov. 2013.
- Korg, Jacob. "Introduction." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Bleak House*. Ed. Jacob Korg. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. 1-20. Print.
- Langbein, John H. "Fact Finding in the English Court of Chancery: A Rebuttal." *The Yale Law Journal* 83.8 (1974): 1620-1630. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.
- Levine, George. "Dickens and Darwin, Science, and Narrative Form." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 28.3 (1986): 250-280. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Nov. 2013.
- Lobban, Michael. "Preparing for Fusion: Reforming the Nineteenth-Century Court of Chancery, Part 1." *Law and History Review* 22.2 (2004): 389-427. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 September 2013.
- Miller, D.A. "Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family, and Bleak House." *Representations* 1 (1983): 59-89. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 Sept. 2013.
- Miller, J. Hilis. "Bleak House." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Bleak House*. Ed. Jacob Korg. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. 74-87. Print.
- Morris, Pam. "Bleak House and the Struggle for the State Domain." *EHL* 68.3 (2001): 679-698. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 Sept. 2013.
- Poon, Phoebe. "Trust and Conscience in *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*." *Dickens Quarterly* 28.1 (2011): 3-21. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 19 Sept. 2013.
- Pykett, Lyn. "Anatomizing Britain." *Critical Issues: Charles Dickens*. New York, NY: PALGRAVE, 2002. 129-139. Print.
- Spilka, Mark. "Religious Folly." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Bleak House*. Ed. Jacob Korg. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. 64-73. Print.
- Van Buren Kelly, Alice. "The Bleak Houses of Bleak House." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25.3 (1970): 253-268. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.
- Welsh, Alexander. *The City of Dickens*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. Print.
- Wilkinson, Ann. "Bleak House: From Faraday to Judgment Day." *EHL* 34.2 (1967): 225-247. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 Sept. 2013.

