

The fictional representation of the family has long been regarded as a Dickensian speciality. But while nineteenth-century reviewers praised Dickens as the pre-eminent novelist of the family, any close examination of his novels reveals a remarkable disjunction between his image as the quintessential celebrant of the hearth, and his interest in fractured families. Catherine Waters offers an explanation of this discrepancy through an examination of Dickens's representation of the family in relation to nineteenth-century constructions of class and gender. Drawing upon feminist and new historicist methodologies, and focussing upon the normalising function of middle-class domestic ideology, Waters concludes that Dickens's novels record a shift in notions of the family away from an earlier stress upon the importance of lineage and blood towards a new ideal of domesticity assumed to be the natural form of the family.

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CATHERINE WATERS

*University of New England
New South Wales*



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>Note on the texts</i>	xi
1 Introduction: the making and breaking of the family	1
2 Fractured families in the early novels: <i>Oliver Twist</i> and <i>Dombey and Son</i>	28
3 Dickens, Christmas and the family	58
4 <i>Little Dorrit</i>	89
5 <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	122
6 <i>Great Expectations</i>	150
7 <i>Our Mutual Friend</i>	175
Postscript	203
<i>Notes</i>	207
<i>Select bibliography</i>	221
<i>Index</i>	231

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