

Victorians

A JOURNAL OF CULTURE AND LITERATURE

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Victorians. A Journal of Culture and Literature publishes scholarly articles by many of the most prominent Victorian academics of the last half century. As such, *VCL* reflects the genesis and development of contemporary Victorian studies. *VCL* is a refereed publication featuring analyses of Victorian culture and literature. The editor welcomes book announcements, review copies, and book reviews, along with announcements of interest to the Victorian academic community.

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Editorial communications should be addressed to:

Dr. Deborah Logan, Editor deborah.logan@wku.edu
Department of English, Cherry Hall 106
Western Kentucky University
1906 College Heights Blvd.
Bowling Green, KY 42101 victorian.newsletter@wku.edu

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Victorians

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Charles Dickens Special Edition

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In Memoriam

Ward Hellstrom

1930—2012

Editor, The Victorian Newsletter

1978—2007

Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"

Deborah A. Logan
Editor

Sara Volpi
Assistant Editor

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Greetings from the Editor

Victorians Journal of Culture and Literature #122, Fall 2012 celebrates the bicentenary of Charles Dickens's birth. I am very pleased to introduce this collection of new work on Dickens produced by scholars throughout the world. A few issues back, *Victorians* offered a special number based exclusively on the work of international scholars in Victorian studies; interestingly, #122 is nearly as international, in terms of scholarly affiliations, and even more eclectic, in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches. What this tells us about the vigor of Dickens studies in the twenty-first century is encouraging: Dickens scholarship continues to thrive, to expand in breadth and depth, and—whether one simply loves the literary, pop-culture, and entertainment value of Dickens's fiction or wishes to subject it to the rigor of interdisciplinary academia—to stand up to intensive scrutiny in our postmodern, globalized era. Through his shrewd insights into the human condition, Dickens, the quintessential Victorian, proves to be both timely and timeless, manifesting a socio-cultural relevance that never goes out of style.

Then and now, a topic of perennial interest is economics. Debtors' prisons may be a quaint relic of the past, but bankruptcy, financial ruin, and reckless speculators are still very much a part of our economic landscape. *Victorians*' first article, "The Ticklish Topic: Finance and Ideology in *Little Dorrit*" by Silvana Collela, highlights the legacy of Victorian economics. Professor Collela's analysis focuses on the roles of Pancks and especially Arthur Clennam—who, after years in China representing the House of Clennam traders, returns to confront some of the more troubling realities of the industrial-capitalist framework underpinning British imperialism.

Another aspect of socio-political links between Britain and China is developed in "A Tale of Two Cities and Chinese Literary History" by Klaudia Hiu Yen Lee. This article marks Dickens's influence a century ago, when the centenary of his birth coincided with the overthrow of China's last monarchy, the inception of the Chinese Republic, and the publication of Chinese translations of his novels. Lee's analysis offers intriguing insights into the politics of translation, wherein Dickens's rendering of the French Revolution, written in the context of English Chartism, is selectively translated to cater to Chinese intellectuals' interest in western ideology while downplaying the perceived dangerous underpinnings of violent political movements.

Aileen Farrar's "Charles Dickens and Hablot K. Browne: Cross-Narrative Creation and Collaboration in *Bleak House*" investigates parallel narratives within parallel narratives: between an omniscient narrator and Esther's first-person narrative; between Browne's dark-plate and regular illustrations; and between Browne's illustrations and Dickens's text. Maria Bachman's "Affective Economies and Charles Dickens's *The Haunted Man*" considers the power of sentimentality, morality, and contemporary ideas of psychology and pseudo-

psychology through an analysis of a lesser-known Christmas book based on Faustian legend.

"Agnes Wickfield and Victorian Mariolatry" by Mark Eslick explores connections between Dickens's portrayal of *David Copperfield's* Agnes—after Dora, the titular hero's second choice—and Catholicism's Virgin Mary, as well as his mother, Clara. "The Devil You Know: Sentimentalism and Gothic Threat in *The Pickwick Papers* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*" by Brad Fruhauff offers a sharp analysis of the function of interpolated digressions in the development of Dickens's signature narrative style. "Dickens and Emotions" by Shu Fang Lai analyzes examples of Victorian art, science and pseudo-science (physiognomy and mesmerism), illustrating their influences on Dickens's characterizations. Stacy Floyd's "The Specter of Class: Revision, Hybrid Identity, and Passing in *Great Expectations*" explores the slippery-slope of class-passing, in situations where economics—rather than race or gender—is the determinate factor. Is it possible that a sudden inheritance can transform one into a gentleman? Or will one's social, even biological, origins remain the primary marker of class status?

"Blank epochs": Narratives of Disability in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *John Halifax, Gentleman*" by Helen Williams studies what narratives about disability do and do not reveal. Both Craik and Dickens create disabled narrators according to contemporary discourse surrounding disability; but readers learn little about the perspectives of those whose physical status remains unarticulated. Williams posits that such deliberate absence is in itself a powerful indicator of Victorian social mores. Finally, "'Another Thing Needful': A New Direction in *Hard Times*' Criticism and Pedagogy" by Katharyn Stober discusses the novel's presentation of fancy and fact, arguing that that binary is far more complex than its critical history suggests. Stober's analysis outlines the consequences of suppressing one part of the fancy-or-fact equation, claiming that a synthesis of the two offers a more viable reading of the novel.

The year 2012 also marks the bicentenary of Robert Browning's birth, and this we will celebrate with new work on Browning in #123, Spring 2013. Many people contributed to this special Dickens issue, and I thank the authors, office associate Laura Wagoner, editorial assistant Sara Volpi, designer Tom Meacham, English Department Head (Interim) Andrew McMichael, and Potter College of Arts and Letters Dean, David Lee.

This *Victorians Journal* is dedicated to the memory of Ward Hellstrom, editor of *Victorian Newsletter* for thirty of its sixty years of publication. For a catalogue of Ward's contributions to Victorian studies, please visit www.wku.edu/victorian. His is, indeed, a tough act to follow.

LITTLE DORRIT

BY

CHARLES DICKENS



LONDON:
BRADBURY & EVANS BOUYERIE STREET
1857

THE TICKLISH TOPIC: FINANCE AND IDEOLOGY IN *LITTLE DORRIT* BY SILVANA COLLELI

Clearly this capitalism was a more sophisticated
beast than I had thought.—Iain Pears, *Stone's Fall*

In Mr. Dorrit's perception, the "ticklish topic" par excellence is money, a painful referent that he would rather consign to silence (589). His denial of economic materiality is exposed in the narrative as one of the many illusions that structure the characters' relation to their social reality. The topic of money or, more broadly, capitalism, is also "ticklish" for the novel itself, especially in connection to the claims of realism. Several critics have questioned Dickens's apparent reluctance to represent salient particulars related to the sphere of money and work. In George Orwell's words: "Nothing is queerer than the vagueness with which [Dickens] speaks of Doyce's 'invention' in *Little Dorrit*. It is represented as something extremely ingenious and revolutionary, 'of great importance to his country and his fellow-creatures,' and it is also an important minor link in the book; yet we are never told what the 'invention' is!" (92). Ruth Yeazell observes that *Little Dorrit* "relentlessly worries the issue of 'doing it' in every sense of the idiom" (33), but the representation of what is to be done remains problematic, since the novel "consistently . . . refuses to let us see 'it'" (35). Even more indirect is the treatment of financial crime, as Mary Poovey argues in *Genre of Credit Economy*. Dickens, Trollope and other Victorian novelists were engaged in a "distancing campaign" expressed in their writing as a well-codified "critical attitude toward money" (373). In *Little Dorrit*, "the Merdle plot figures only briefly, the details of the financier's crimes remain vague, and the effects of the speculation he inspires are registered in a moral vocabulary that obscures his actual crimes" (375). Intruding upon a controversial factual scenario, the "moral vocabulary" functions as a distancing device in the service of literariness, hence the abstract quality of Merdle's crimes in Dickens's fictional rendering of events that had been amply documented in the public press.¹ Literary writing, Poovey concludes, is thus emphatically distinguished from "informational writing" (373). To the list of textual omissions, one could also add the lack of concrete information regarding the commercial dealings of Clennam and Co.—is it a "private bank," as in Gail Houston's deduction (80), or a commercial house trading in tea and other Chinese goods? The secrets that this "debilitated old house in the city" (Dickens 178) hides in its interiors include the absent "it" of trade.

Many useful insights can be derived from a model of reading that problematizes the unsaid and values omissions or gaps as part of an aesthetic strategy, whether deliberate or not. But this analysis is less interested in the unknowable or the vague that might signal textual distance from historical reality; rather, it reconsiders the tension between the knowable—what gets included within the representative space of the novel—and its misrecognition. The picture of mid-Victorian capitalism Dickens draws in *Little Dorrit* is remarkable for its attentiveness to both the fantasies that mediate participation in the capitalist game and the disavowals that render this participation possible.

¹ Merdle's character is based on John Sadler (1813-56), Irish MP and financier whose ruinous speculations were so disastrous that he committed suicide. The scandal created a media frenzy.

The most basic definition of ideology, writes Slavoj Žižek, “is probably the well-known phrase from Marx’s *Capital*: ‘Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es’—‘they do not know it, but they are doing it’” (*Sublime* 24). Žižek’s own revision of this formula emphasizes that subjects know, while acting *as if* they did not: “They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing as if they did not know” (30). What Žižek calls “the paradox of an enlightened false consciousness” (25-26) might be helpful in explaining Arthur Clennam’s subject-position vis-à-vis the world of capitalist production. Just as the fiction of “Nobody” structures his relation to the affective sphere, a similar disavowal sustains his vocational trajectory from commerce (the Gothicized House of Clennam) to industry (the moralized Doyce and Clennam partnership), or from anti-capitalist indignation to pro-capitalist adaptation. The final section of this paper analyzes Arthur’s belated *Bildung*, focusing on those anamorphic moments in the text in which the distance between his “knowing” and his “doing” is more visible.

There is little doubt that, in *Little Dorrit*, Dickens confronts the fetish of money and illegal enrichment most ardently. One could agree that the representation of Merdle’s portentous scheme lacks concreteness, but this referential vagueness is counterbalanced by Dickens’s critical engagement with the fantasy structure of speculation, with the dreams it sanctions, and the desires it legitimates. As *Little Dorrit* suggests, finance as fever and finance as fantasy are two sides of the same coin. Pancks, more than Merdle, deserves the honor of historical particularity as he fully understands and experiences the libidinal force of “investments.” “Nineteenth-century realist fiction,” writes Harry Shaw, “makes most sense when it is viewed as an attempt to deal with situations which involve partial knowledge and continual approximation” (29). Dickens represents the already structured, constituted, and symbolized realities of mid-nineteenth-century capitalism not only through the evocative force of concrete particulars (including absent referents), but also by re-modulating the “moral vocabulary” (to use Poovey’s expression) so effectively in place in the Victorian marketplace, as Paul Johnson has recently demonstrated: “Hand in hand with the formal institutions and the commercial and financial information that constitute the modern marketplace go the informal institutions that make this market structure work—the moral codes, the behavioural assumptions, the rules of thumb, the unspoken agreements” (11). Victorian novels focus in diverse ways on these “informal institutions,” capturing the historicity of the market especially when attending to the “valuations, opinions, talk on the street, imagination, expectations, hope” that in Deirdre McCloskey’s assessment “are what drive an economy” (8). In this respect, the referential accuracy of *Little Dorrit*’s realism may reside in objectives and procedures, rather than in the presence (or absence) of particular objects or details.

The Magic of Finance

Like Timon of Athens, whose “magic of bounty” (*Tim.* 1.1.8-9) dazzles the Athenians in Shakespeare’s play, Merdle is most visible when least engaged in financial transactions. Both characters are cast in the role of host, presiding over banquets or elaborate dinners through which they consolidate a position of power that derives from an accumulation of wealth whose origins remain undisclosed. Timon’s flatterers admire his unbounded generosity, just as Merdle’s social acquaintances (Bar, Treasury, Bishop, Admiralty) adulate him and praise his ability to coin money. The more detached these moneyed

characters appear from the material sources of their wealth,² the more grandiose is their stature and unquestionable their prestige, both conveniently expressed in the words of self-interested friends: “At dinner [Merdle] was envied and flattered as a being of might, was Treasured, Barred and Bishopsed as much as he would” (387). The analogies between Timon and Merdle suggest that the lack of specific details regarding Merdle’s operations in the City is a time-honored convention. What captures the interest of Shakespeare and Dickens is the social network that pivots on money and the intrinsic fragility of an architecture of belief which provides dramatic interest when its artificiality is finally exposed. Timon takes himself off to the woods, cursing the Athenians for their ingratitude, while Merdle takes his life, like many other fictional and real financiers of the time, guilty of speculating with other people’s money.³ Dickens was inspired by the events leading to John Sadlier’s suicide and was presumably well acquainted with the particulars of Sadlier’s crimes. His imaginative reformulation of financial felony speaks the language of social satire, with abstractions and personifications taking precedence over accurate information or technical details.⁴ As Mary Poovey suggests, “Dickens might well have wanted to capitalize on readers’ interest in Sadlier to support sales of *Little Dorrit*, but he did not want curiosity about the real-life financier to interfere with the moral lesson about the redemptive capacity of love that his reconfigured novel was shaped to deliver” (375). Such indirectness in the representation of finance capital, however, is not the only framing device Dickens employs. The narrative openly engages with what is most puzzling about finance: less the incidence of crime than the astonishing resilience of speculation as a popular dream. No matter how many scandals and frauds the Victorian press denounced, or how painstakingly committed financial journalists, like David Morier Evans, exposed the criminal particulars of commercial crises, speculation retained a powerful grip on the imagination of ordinary citizens.⁵ Dickens traces “the progress of an epidemic”—the speculative frenzy preceding Merdle’s collapse—among the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard, where even Cavalletto is considering an unlikely investment in Merdle’s enterprise:

As a vast fire will fill the air to a great distance with his roar, so the sacred flame which the mighty Barnacles had fanned caused the air to resound more and more, with the name of Merdle. It was deposited on every lip, and carried into every ear. There never was, there never had been, there never again should be, such a man as Mr. Merdle. Nobody, as aforesaid, knew what he had done, but everybody knew him to be the greatest that had appeared. . . . Down in Bleeding Heart Yard, where there was not one unappropriated halfpenny, as lively an interest was taken in this paragon of man as on the Stock Exchange . . . Mr. Baptist, sole lodger of Mr. and Mrs. Plornish, was reputed in whispers to lay by the savings which were the result of his simple

² Timon shuns the steward’s warnings about the uncertain state of his lord’s finance—“O my good lord, / At many times I brought in my accounts, / Laid them before you; you would throw them off” (*Tim.* 2.2.820-22) while Merdle appears most modest and aloof among his guests.

³ On suicide as a paradigm of financial fiction, see Nancy Henry.

⁴ See Myers (91) and Knezevic (162).

⁵ Mackay’s and Evan’s works document in different ways the force of popular delusions. See also Hollingshead.

and moderate life, for investment in one of Mr. Merdle's certain enterprises. (548)

Spreading with the "malignity and rapidity of the Plague" (547), the "epidemic" is a democratic contagion, sparing no one. While the metaphor of speculation as infectious fever carries unequivocally negative connotations in Dickens's novel as well as in other contemporary accounts (journalistic or fictional), the propensity for risk-taking and the fantasy sustaining it play an important role in the narrative as springboards for action, especially in relation to Pancks's progress. Locked in the subordinate and underpaid role of Mr. Casby's confidential man of business, Pancks appears as the agent of oppression, urging the tenants of Bleeding Heart Yard to pay their rent in words that echo Shylock's cry: "I'll have my bond!" (*Mer.* 3.3.4; *LD* 273). His rise from downtrodden rent-collector to chief clerk and partner involves a public moment of rebelliousness that sets him free from the constraints of a dependant position and opens up the more rewarding prospect of entering into partnership with Arthur Clennam and Daniel Doyce.⁶ "In terms of their essential formal position," Alex Woloch claims, "minor characters are the proletariat of the novel" (27). Pancks fits this description quite well: he is made to bear the burden of the business philosophy—"grinding, drudging, toiling, every minute we're awake" (162)—from which Arthur can conveniently distance himself. However, although Pancks's "minorness" remains unchallenged in the novel's "character-system," to use Woloch's narratological categories, his "character-space" acquires centrality as he turns detective or "fortune-teller" to help the Dorrits regain their wealth.⁷

How does he do that? Pancks's scheme, unlike Merdle's, is copiously detailed. Prompted by Arthur's insistent questions, Pancks reveals how he raised the money to carry out extensive research throughout the country that could substantiate his initial hypothesis. Arthur admires him for his "sagacity," "patience" and "secrecy," but Pancks takes pride, more specifically, in his ability to borrow money:

"I said to that—boiling-over old Christian," Mr. Pancks pursued, appearing greatly to relish this descriptive epithet, "that I had got a little project on hand; a hopeful one; I told him a hopeful one; which wanted a certain small capital. I proposed to him to lend me the money on my note. Which he did, at twenty; sticking the twenty on in a business-like way, and putting it into the note, to look like a part of the principal. If I had broken down after that, I should have been his grubber for the next seven years at half wages and double grind." (397)

Like a well-intentioned company promoter, Pancks persuades the Ruggs and Mr. Casby to invest in his secret scheme, facing considerable hazards of which he is fully aware. He bases the whole project on a piece of information randomly acquired through his compulsive reading of "advertisements of next of kin" (163) in the press and is willing to risk seven years of bondage to float this uncertain scheme. In terms of size, Pancks's design is substantially different from Merdle's, but it remains a gamble analogous to other, bigger plots ordained in the City. Nor is this benevolent plan purely charitable,

⁶ For a perceptive reading of the "misunderstood" figure of Pancks, see Dvorak.

⁷ Woloch defines the "character-space" as "that particular and charged encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole" (14). The "character-system" is described as "the arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces—differentiated configurations and manipulations of the human figure—into a unified narrative structure."

since Pancks names a specific sum of money—"a thousand pounds" (398)—as adequate recompense for his efforts.⁸ The speculation pays off and both the Dorrits and Pancks stand to benefit from it. It is in relation to the character of Pancks that Dickens tests the effective reach of speculation—not just as synonymous with crime but as a fantasy of emancipation. While Pancks's first "conspiracy" (294) is prevalently pro-social, granting freedom and wealth to others, his second attempt at "investment" is motivated by a desire for redistributive justice that is charged with seditious energy: "Why should you leave all the gains to the gluttons, knaves and impostors?" asks Pancks; "Why should you leave all the gains that are to be got to my proprietor and the like of him?" (561). The "magic name" of Merdle may offer just a vague "consolation" (548) to the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard, but in Pancks's case it provides the stimulus for change.

Noteworthy in Dickens's treatment of the financial plot is the juxtaposition of ideological and utopian elements. By the time he convinces Arthur to invest in Merdle's scheme ("Go in and win!" 561), Pancks has fully assimilated the ideology of finance, which revolves around two main tenets: decisions are reduced to calculations; what *one* can do, *many* can replicate. As Pancks confidently states: "I've gone into it. I've made the calculations. I've worked it. They're safe and genuine" (558). In the "kaleidoscope of finance," as Alex Preda defines the "public positive discourse on markets and speculation" (80) that developed from the 1850s onwards, "financial behavior was made dependent on knowledge and presented as thoroughly rational: it was a matter of studying, observing, analyzing" (92). Central to this legitimating discourse was also the redefinition of speculation "not according to whether it contributes or not to society, but as a universal force, as intrinsic to human nature and as present in all societal domains" (176). The legitimacy of financial markets today, Preda argues, is the result of a series of successful symbolizations through which the "boundaries of finance" came to be redrawn to include "apologetic as well as critical stances with respect to financial speculation" (203):

the kaleidoscope of speculation encompasses laudatory stances towards speculators, as well as critical ones. During the nineteenth century much of the criticism nests itself within fiction writing, due to the protesting voices being partially displaced by the authority of brokers and investors writing "factual" accounts of speculation, "histories" and "documentaries." Nevertheless, criticism, as well as an apology of speculators, operated to a large extent with the same categories and figures.

Preda insists on the flexibility of this kaleidoscope as a classificatory system able to accommodate contradictory elements: rationality and irrationality, playing by the rules and daring to break them, "calls for exclusion" and "calls for inclusion" (194), approval and disapproval of the figure of the charismatic speculator. This ideology gained ascendancy in the second half of the nineteenth century and contributed considerably to sustaining the dominance of financial markets despite much criticism.⁹ Preda's insights are

⁸ "'Your own recompense for all this, Mr. Pancks,' said Clennam, 'ought to be a large one.' 'I don't mistrust getting it, sir,' said Pancks. . . . 'Money out of pocket made good, time fairly allowed for, and Mr. Rugg's bill settled, a thousand pounds would be a fortune to me.'" (398).

⁹ Central in the analyses of both Preda and De Goede is an awareness of the role played by different strands of criticism, over the centuries, in naturalizing the image of global finance as a "Phoenix" ever rising from the ashes (De Goede 3).

useful to reassess Dickens's position vis-à-vis speculation. *Little Dorrit* encourages mistrust of finance while at the same time showing that the desire to speculate is indeed universal and that some forms of gambling may be for the common good. The new "science of financial markets" (86), of which Pancks is an advocate and a victim, entailed a democratic myth of social mobility, making room for egalitarian yearnings. Dickens does not reward Pancks with unearned wealth but links his liberation from the mastery of the Patriarch to the financial vicissitudes of the thousand pounds he obtained from his first conspiratorial scheme. "Do you mean, my good Pancks," asked Clennam, emphatically, "that you would put that thousand pounds of yours, let us say, for instance, out at this kind of interest?" "Certainly," said Pancks. "Already done it, sir" (Dickens 558). By investing and losing all he has, Pancks finds the inspiration to turn rebellious, publicly accusing his "proprietor" and emerging as "the voice of truth and justice" (Young 75):

"I have discharged myself from your service," said Pancks, "that I may tell you what you are. You're one of a lot of impostors that are the worst lot of the lots to be met with. Speaking as a sufferer by both, I don't know that I wouldn't as soon have the Merdle lot as your lot. You're a driver in disguise, a screw by deputy, a wringer, and a squeezer, and shaver by substitute! You're a philanthropic sneak! You're a shabby deceiver!" (Dickens 763)

That Mr. Casby is here depicted as a more despicable impostor than Merdle himself may owe something to the fact that the fever of speculation, unlike the oppressive "drudging" and "grinding" of everyday business, is sustained by dreams and utopian fantasies that the novel is not inclined to dismiss as mere delusions. Pancks's belief in "investments" (557) becomes truly contagious after Arthur confesses his desire to make reparations for the wrongdoing of the House of Clennam; it is on the strength of this desire that Arthur too is hooked. Pancks provides him with a double rationale, based on the one hand on the mantra of "calculations" and on the other on his past experience of successful risk-taking: "Be as rich as you honestly can. It's your duty," he urges Arthur, "Not for your sake, but for the sake of others" (561). Dickens does not absolve the desire to speculate even when carried out "for the sake of others," but he does connect this desire to the unmistakable satisfaction of debunking the powerful. The punishment Pancks has in store for his employer—the cutting off of his long hair¹⁰—"will be understood by any reader," as Lionel Trilling observed, "with the least tincture of psychoanalytic knowledge" (289). The comic pleasure yielded for this scene has radical overtones, and it is significant that Dickens ultimately redeems the speculator by turning his economic losses into a political gain.¹¹

Dickens's distaste for the nebulous scheming of the grand financier is conveyed in the scathing accents of social satire, but the narrative of Pancks's rise from "money-grabber" to "fortune-teller," speculator, and finally "partner" is infused with a good deal of sympathy. While indirectness prevails in the treatment of enormous financial speculations,

¹⁰ "Quick as lightning, Mr. Pancks, who, for some moments, had had his right hand in his coat pocket, whipped out a pair of shears, swooped upon the Patriarch behind, and snipped off short, the sacred locks that flowed upon his shoulders" (765).

¹¹ On Dickens's relation to the popular radical heritage, see Ledger and Sen. Dvorak argues that "The scene in which Pancks discharges himself from Casby's service . . . needs to be read as the most important in the novel, for it brings together Dickens's themes about money and disguise in an effective—and often wonderfully comic—way" (342).

particularity is the prerogative of the small speculator, whose wishes and fantasies are restored to the centre of the picture as vital forces that propel the plot and instigate the will to change. As Aaron Matz explains, realism tends to be "associated with the specific and the local," while satire is "a fundamentally a-historical, context-resistant mode of writing. Satire tells us the same, continuous truth about mankind's folly; realism articulates it in new ways" (xii). The oscillation between satire and realism, in Dickens's treatment of speculation, projects a double image of finance as both a trans-historical realm of unbridled greed and folly, and a localized sphere of individual action where corrections are still possible and imaginable. As an intervention in the heated mid-nineteenth-century debate about the excesses of finance capitalism, *Little Dorrit* is interesting precisely to the extent that it acknowledges the vices as well as the virtues of speculative dreams, the fever and the fantasy that render the magic of finance so very powerful. If denouncing financial felony, as the Victorians relentlessly did, was sufficient to curb the power of financial markets, crises would be more easily avoided. This is the realistic lesson that *Little Dorrit* delivers; moral indignation is an important component of this lesson, but so is the recognition of the residue of hope that lingers on when the accusations have all been vented.

"Something Wrong Somewhere"

Despite the infectious potential of speculation, some characters in the novel are immune to this plague. Notable among them is Mrs. Clennam, a most inflexible figure of female Ur-capitalist, acquisitive, self-interested, and stubbornly attached to her business identity. The House of Clennam is a remnant of the past in more than one way: it conflates "home" and "work," it is run by a stern, Calvinist widow, and it proves impervious to modern finance.¹² Its collapse is a matter of self-combustion, not a consequence of ill-advised investments. When Arthur returns home from China, the House appears to him "out of date and out of purpose":

Mother, our House has done less and less for some years past, and our dealings have been progressively on the decline . . . the track we have kept is not the track of time; and we have been left far behind . . . Even this old house in which we speak . . . is an instance of what I say. In my father's earlier time, and in his uncle's time before him, it was a place of business—really a place of business, and business resort. Now it is a mere anomaly and incongruity here, out of date and out of purpose. (56)

It is not just the confusion between "House" and "home" that Arthur finds incongruous. Even more disturbing is Mrs. Clennam's enduring role as "the moving power of all this machinery" (59), a role that appears unnatural and casts a long shadow over the business of the House and, more generally, over the sphere of economic agency: "In grasping at money and in driving hard bargains . . . some one may have been grievously deceived,

¹² "Mrs. Clennam is presented as a stony and omnipotent figure, her power is quite simply emasculating, and in this she is connected to other mother surrogates in Dickens's fiction" (Showalter 34). See also Schor, who includes Mrs. Clennam in the group of heroines that "have fierce desires, a passion for narrative, and an obsession with property" (137). See also Davidoff and Hall (1987) for an historical account of the role of women, especially widows, in the management of family businesses in the early decades of the nineteenth century (279-89).

injured, ruined" Arthur reminds his stepmother; "You were the moving power of all this machinery before my birth; your stronger spirit has been infused into all my father's dealings, for more than two score years." Arthur's suspicion that a wrong of some kind has been committed in the past is almost redundant here, since in his perception moneymaking is already equated with illicit "grasping," and driving bargains is loaded with unfavorable connotations, being associated with suffering, deception, and ruin: "I have seen little happiness come of money," he concludes.¹³ Whether there is a real secret tainting the biography of this House, Arthur rejects the possibility of replacing or aiding his stepmother in the running of the business out of sheer distaste for the predatory capitalism she embodies. Mrs. Clennam resents Arthur's depiction of her own and her husband's work—the "wear and tear and toil and self-denial"—as "so much plunder" (58), but the narrator sides with Arthur and his indictment of the "grasping" at the heart of the capitalist game. As Amanda Anderson avers, "the vague sense of guilt haunting this commercial traveler from the east, and his forceful resigning of all connection with Clennam and Co. upon his return to England, suggest a wider sensitivity to the violence of British global capitalism and imperial concerns, and to the vast economic imbalances generated thereby" (72).

At the beginning of the novel, the main character already knows that "economic imbalances" are the dark flipside of the notion of progress. Arthur enters the novel in the shape of an accomplished anti-capitalist, with enough experience to pronounce his conclusive, negative judgment on money, and a clear perception that there is something wrong (if not monstrous) in the "machinery" over which his mother is such a commanding figure. He knows all this, yet in the unfurling of the story, he acts as if he did not, choosing to persevere along the business trajectory, albeit in a different direction. The illusion, as Žižek reminds us, does not reside in the knowing but in the doing. Arthur's knowledge renders his participation in the sphere of capitalist production possible once again: by distancing himself from the "plundering" of his mother, he finds new reasons to be active. So long as he believes, in his heart, that capitalism is bad, he is free to continue to participate in capitalist exchange.¹⁴ This belief is renewed with every visit he pays to "the grim home of his youth":

As he went along, upon a dreary night, the dim streets by which he went seemed all depositories of oppressive secrets. The deserted counting-houses, with their secrets of books and papers locked up in chests and safes; the banking-houses, with their secrets of strong rooms and wells, the keys of which were in a very few secret pockets and a very few secret breasts; the secrets of all the dispersed grinders in the vast mill, among whom there were doubtless plunderers, forgers and trust-betrayers of many sorts, whom the light of any day that dawned might reveal; he could have fancied that these things, in hiding, imparted a heaviness to the air. (520)

¹³ The result of his homecoming, as Monica Cohen suggests, "is that the whole notion of business, along with the figure of a businessman, assumes a malevolent hue" (114).

¹⁴ "Clennam's willingness to 'lay down all he has' is less a matter of filial ingratitude than a willingness to play by a rule of equivalent exchange which ensures that the portability of property never rests" (Nunokawa 22).

In Arthur's "impressible" imagination, not even the dead are "at rest from doing harm." Secrecy defines the essence of capitalism, regardless of what "the light of any day" might eventually disclose. As William Myers noticed, secrets "do not make for any real suspense" in this novel (77), but their ubiquity reinforces the sense of ineradicable darkness at the heart of a system that goes on perpetrating the plunder and deception which Arthur perceives all too clearly. What is it then that makes Arthur's intervention in this system stand apart from the compulsion to do harm, which is seen as endemic? The narrative of his professional rejuvenation depends on the possibility of differentiating between good and bad forms of participation in the capitalist game. "I have no will," Arthur confesses to Mr. Meagles, on his way back from China, "I am the son . . . of a hard father and mother. I am the child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything, for whom what could not be weighed, measured and priced, had no existence" (33). His belated *Bildung* is, in a sense, willed by others and steered in the right direction by sagacious men of business—Mr. Meagles, Daniel Doyce, and even Pancks—who are emphatically different from his "hard" parents. No longer in business, Mr. Meagles has already been removed from the source of potential harm when he encounters Arthur for the first time and encourages him to behave "like a practical man." The chapter in which Arthur comes to a decision regarding "what he was to do henceforth in life" (189) is entitled "Nobody's weakness" and in it two narrative strands—the vocational and the sentimental—are interwoven. The feelings he has for Pet (Miss Meagles) are acknowledged only indirectly as "Nobody's weakness," the object of a "supposition" (200) or a denial. A similar gesture of misrecognition guides his choice of a new career: he settles for business once again. Although this choice is a confirmation of his previous identity, it is made to appear as a rupture with the past, a new commencement: "having disembarrassed myself from an occupation that was painful to me for many reasons, [I] wish to devote myself and what means I have, to another pursuit" (199).

Arthur's initial indecision is bound up with his "misgiving" about the secret guilt of the House of Clennam; he is reluctant to embark upon a new occupation, fearing that there is some "unsatisfied claim upon his justice" (189). From past experience he knows that weighing, measuring, and pricing everything is wrong, and suspects that this habit has caused harm to an unspecified third party. But this knowledge is effaced when he encounters Daniel Doyce, who enjoys in the novel the same mythic status that was reserved for the "heroes of invention," glorified as national champions by Macaulay and Francis Jeffrey among others:

A composed and unobtrusive self-sustainment was noticeable in Daniel Doyce—a calm knowledge that what was true must remain true, in spite of all the Barnacles in the family ocean, and would be just the truth, and neither more nor less, when even the sea had run dry—which had a kind of greatness in it, though not of the official quality. (MacLeod 192)

Seemingly unperturbed by the gross inefficiencies of the Circumlocution Office, immune to the petty habit of reducing everything to market value, Doyce stands for a noble ideal of "unobtrusive" self-sufficiency. He runs the Works and takes an active part in the "machinery" of capitalism, but the way Dickens presents him minimizes Doyce's actual involvement in this system and maximizes his remoteness from its darkness and ugliness. The "fetish" that enables Doyce to "fully participate in the frantic pace of the capitalist

game, while sustaining the perception that [he] is not really in it" (Žižek, "Spectre" 15) is the invisible invention to which he has devoted his life, the absent referent that suffuses his work with the glow of pure art.¹⁵ The refusal to name this invention, to reduce it to the status of a recognizable product, is at one with the disavowal that structures Dickens's representation of good or ethical capitalism.

Arthur opts for the "truth" that Doyce represents, a truth antithetical to the secrecy and guilty opacity that he continues to perceive everywhere, in the social geography of London, in the paper labyrinths of the Circumlocution Office, in the gloomy recesses of his family home.¹⁶ Doyce's account books, that Arthur audits before accepting the partnership, are a marvel of transparency—"all the results of his undertakings during many years were distinctly set forth, and were ascertainable with ease" (260)—just as Doyce himself, with his modesty, good sense, and plain speaking, is a champion of honesty and simplicity. The novel encourages readers to believe that there is a model of capitalist enterprise functioning according to softer, more humane rules, the Doyce and Clennam partnership being synonymous with friendship.¹⁷ The acquisitive and predatory mentality that Arthur identifies with his parents has been replaced by Doyce's heroic creativity, and Arthur's business identity, no longer painful to him, appears as a "welcome change": "he glanced at these things with a feeling of pleasure in his pursuit that was new to him" (263).

Going against the grain of the novel's totalistic vision of the darkness and systemic violence of capitalism, tangible in its effects on the deprived inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard for whom the word "manufacturers" sounds like "malefactors" (146), the representation of Doyce's factory is remarkable for the cheerfulness and lightness associated with it. In the chapter entitled "Machinery in motion," the industrial *intérieur* is observed from Arthur's viewpoint in the counting-house: "The noises were sufficiently removed and shut out from the counting-house to blend into a busy hum, interspersed with periodical clinks and thumps. The patient figures at work were swarthy with the filings of iron and steel that danced on every bench and bubbled up through every chink in the planking" (263). This attenuated, muted picture of industrial work serves the ideological purpose of cordoning off the sense of oppression otherwise palpable in the novel. But when Flora and Mr. F's Aunt appear unexpectedly, "laboring up the step-ladder," their vision from below alters the picture significantly: "Good gracious, Arthur,—I should say Mr. Clennam, far more proper—the climb we have had to get up here and how ever to get down again without a fire-escape and Mr. F's Aunt slipping through the steps and bruised all over and you in the machinery and foundry way too only think, and never told us!"

Flora's anarchic loquacity is not always nonsensical. In this episode, her words belie Arthur's idyllic vision, introducing a jarring note of discord: the climb is

¹⁵ As Claire Petit remarks, Doyce's labor is represented as "unalienated" (197); the figure of the inventor, in this novel, "reflects the deep uncertainties of Dickens's own thinking about creativity and intellectual property" (191). Yeazell suggests that "to give any particular name to Doyce's invention would risk diminishing his mythic stature, reducing the generic Maker to a particular, bathetically limited figure" (36).

¹⁶ Julian Wolfreys claims that "Dickens's text maintains the very idea of London as a 'land of fragments,'" hinting at the "otherwise invisible who haunt the structures of power and law on which the city is built, as London's silent inhabitants" (96). In Nancy Metz's words, "the distinctive atmosphere of *Little Dorrit* owes more to the generalized evocation of decline than it does to the immediacy with which particular scenes are rendered" (65).

¹⁷ Taylor points out that there was "a substantial body of opinion," in the 1840s and 1850s, defending partnership law as "the natural providential system governing business activity, rooted in notions of personal responsibility and reinforcing the primacy of character in commerce" (49).

uncomfortable, the vertical structure of the workshops ill-conceived, and the lack of a fire-escape dangerous for all the "patient figures" working inside. Flora sees potential and real harm where Arthur perceives a pleasant "busy hum." Their divergent views may not have equal significance, since Flora's monologues are meant to be comic; but, like other minor characters in Dickens's novels, Flora "compels *our* attention" with her exuberant idiolect and random observations that upset "the balance, or the proportion, between a minor character's place in the *histoire* and in the *discours*" (Woloch 129). In her interaction with the protagonist, Flora is the character that most artlessly calls into question Arthur's new identity. She insists on addressing him as "Arthur—Doyce and Clennam," joining together the past and the present, the son and the partner, regardless of his wish to break with the past. When she speaks of business, it is to remind Arthur that "business is equally business call it what you will and business habits are just the same" (265). The very structure of her rolling sentences seems resistant to subtle distinctions. In one scene, Arthur's goodness comes under attack when a startling memory of his boyish cruelty is evoked by Flora:

Arthur—confirmed habit—Mr. Clennam—took me down into an unused kitchen eminent for mouldiness and proposed to secrete me there for life and feed me on what he could hide from his meals when he was home for the holidays and on dry bread in disgrace which at that halcyon period too frequently occurred. (656)

This memory anticipates by a few paragraphs the scene in which Arthur relentlessly interrogates Affrey, exasperated by her refusal to reveal what she supposedly knows about the secrets of the House of Clennam. Locked in the "dragon closet" (658), "trembling and struggling the whole time," Affrey repeatedly implores him to leave her alone, while he persists in asking questions she does not want to hear: "Don't ask me nothing . . . I have been in a dream for ever so long. Go away, go away!" (661). Arthur is not a Gothic oppressor, but in this chapter he behaves like one, increasing the dose of terrors that Affrey has to bear. Since he fails to obtain even a morsel of information, his pressing appears all the more gratuitous.

Flora's comments function as humorous reminders that, despite Arthur's best intentions, his involvement in the "machinery" of business remains dubious.¹⁸ Through her interventions, the narrative hints at lines of continuity between benevolence and cruelty that run counter to the "intensified polarities" of Dickens's "melodramatic fix" (Crosby 75). A similar pattern emerges in the interaction between Arthur and his putative mother. In their dialogues, Mrs. Clennam deftly deploys the rhetoric of business as the one idiom that she still has in common with her son, implicitly reminding Arthur that his and her standard of values descends from the same matrix. For example, when the villain Blandois is introduced to Mrs. Clennam, she brushes aside Arthur's solicitous warnings as contrary to the finest rules of business that imply placing trust in strangers and foreigners:

"The gentleman," pursued Mrs. Clennam, "on a former occasion brought a letter of recommendation to us from highly esteemed and responsible correspondents . . . Therefore, Arthur . . . the

¹⁸ In the figure of Flora, "memories are disseminated through profligate speech . . . Thus, it may be said that Amy's role is to restrict the economy of memory, while Flora's is to emphasize performatively a blurring contest of memory's fragments" (Wolfreys 101).

gentleman comes here as an acquaintance, and no stranger; and it is much to be regretted that your unreasonable temper should have found offence in him. I regret it. I say so to the gentleman. You will not say so, I know; therefore I say it for myself and Flintwinch, since with us two the gentleman's business lies." (524)

Arthur's objections are silenced by Mrs. Clennam's faith in the principles and tacit agreements of the business community; a letter of recommendation from "esteemed and responsible correspondents" is more dependable than Arthur's vague suspicions still unsupported, at this stage, by any evidence of wrongdoing. She stands by a method that is recognizably profitable—the same method that has allowed Arthur himself to enter into partnership with Doyce (previously a stranger to him), thanks to the recommendation of a common acquaintance. Having no counter-argument to oppose to his mother's sharp reasoning, he is forced to leave. The most frustrating element in this scene is Arthur's dumbness, his inability to find convincing arguments to prove his mother wrong. The plot, of course, will confirm the villainy of Blandois, but it will not entirely dispel the impression that Arthur's weakness vis-à-vis his mother is a consequence of their unacknowledged similarities, as both are actively engaged in the running of business ventures and show an analogous tendency to stick to business habits, which, as Flora aptly remarks, "are just the same" everywhere.¹⁹

By associating the evils of capitalism with the Medusa-like figure of a business woman, unable to be officially in charge of her own family firm but all the more eager to steer it the way she likes, Arthur's progress can be configured as a struggle to reclaim economic agency from the grips of a castrating maternal figure. This structure facilitates the perception that once order has been restored, and the secret machinations of a usurper of masculine prerogatives have been uncovered, economic agency will emerge purified. However, the narrative also shows that the distinction between good and bad forms of participation in the capitalist game is not always tenable, hence Arthur's persistent sense of frustration in his dealings with Clennam and Co.; his inability to withstand the allure of speculation; and his ambivalent attitude vis-à-vis the only minor character in the novel—Cavalletto—that can be identified as a "worker," an employee of Doyce and Clennam.

As Fleishman argues, the "human relationship most frequently found in the world of *Little Dorrit* is that of master and servant" (575). Introduced in the first chapter, alongside his master Rigaud/Blandois, Cavalletto appears as "the perfect type of the unrebelling servant" (577), whose otherness is a source of comic pleasure. After the accident, Arthur offers him "odd jobs" at the Works (298), but refuses to be classified as his "proprietor": "No!" he objects to Pancks, "I am rather his adviser than his proprietor" (557). A social relation of production, not an interpersonal one of dominion and servitude, regulates the interaction between the employer and the Italian "Altro." Yet on more than one occasion Arthur's "proprietary share in Cavalletto" comes to the fore. He feels entitled to dispose of the Italian as he pleases, suggesting that Cavalletto should accompany the Meagles on their way to Rome as an unlikely interpreter (506). In terms of humor, Dickens makes the most of Cavalletto's linguistic otherness and ineptitude; Arthur's proposition, therefore,

¹⁹ Significantly, it is Amy Dorrit, early in the narrative, who connects Arthur's "earnestness" to his step-mother's, "with the great difference that she was earnest in asperity and he in gentleness" (Dickens 168). The quality of earnestness is valued highly by Amy as it is the standard against which she gauges the failings of such characters as Henry Gowan who lack firmness of purpose.

seems all the more incongruous. But the episode in which his dominion over Cavalletto becomes most visible occurs while Arthur is in the debtors' prison, finally confronting Rigaud, whom Pancks and his friend have managed to track down. This is the only scene where Cavalletto shows a modicum of insubordination, unwilling to take new orders from his previous master who treats him as if he "were an Italian horse or mule" (717). The dynamic Dickens imagines places Arthur in the position of the new master who echoes the orders issued by Rigaud:

He set down his glass and said:

"I'll not fill it. What! I am born to be served. Come then, you Cavalletto, and fill!"

The little man looked at Clennam, whose eyes were occupied with Rigaud, and, seeing no prohibition, got up from the ground, and poured out from the bottle into the glass. The blending, as he did so, of his old submission with a sense of something humorous; the striving of that with a certain smouldering ferocity, which might have flashed fire in an instant . . . and the easy yielding of all, to a good-natured, careless, predominant propensity to sit down on the ground again; formed a very remarkable combination of character. (714)

Whether with a nod, a few words or simply by remaining silent, Arthur instructs the Italian to "fetch [Rigaud] what he wants" (713) and to remain submissive, effectively keeping at bay the potential "ferocity" of this otherwise harmless servant. This scene is a variation on the theme of villainy introduced in the first chapter of the novel, and shows Arthur's implication in the system of oppression that pivots on Rigaud. It is a symptomatic scene for it reveals the "obscure" bond (Showalter 31) connecting Arthur and Rigaud as well as the persistence of patterns of domination and servitude even in the modern relation of production (in which work is exchanged for money) that Arthur claims to have established with Cavalletto. In this case too, the narrative oscillates between a belief in good, responsible capitalism (championed by Arthur) and a diffuse perception of "something wrong somewhere,"²⁰ a recognition that darker forces are still at work.

In *Little Dorrit*, this recognition is an integral part of the social picture Dickens draws: it crops up in his descriptions of the London streets and in the "confused" vision of Mr. Plornish—"He could tell you who suffered, but he couldn't tell you whose fault it was" (146); in the representation of the "atavistic" debtors' prison (Cohen 103); and in the ostensible gloominess of the House of Clennam. Dickens's sensitivity to social inequalities is unquestionable. What makes it unique is the emphasis on the various types of illusions, fantasies, and misrecognitions that help sustain the "machinery" that produces those inequalities. *Little Dorrit* offers an extended exploration of the powerful sway of fantasies, some of them openly acknowledged as such. Mr. Dorrit's fiction of gentility, buttressed by his daughter's kind lies; Pancks's mathematical delusions, legitimized even by Doyce ("There was an error in your calculations" [783]); Mrs. Plornish's "little fiction" of painted happiness (550), and Arthur's suppositions about Nobody in love are all presented as explicit fantasies that help mediate the characters' relation to their social reality. In stark contrast to these innocent mediations stands the cynical realism of jaded

²⁰ "Something Wrong Somewhere" is the title of chapter 5 in book II.

characters, from the cosmopolitan villain Rigaud to the blasé artist Henry Gowan, who accept the rule of money as the only determinant of their lives.

Somewhere in the middle between explicit fantasies and cynical realism lie the more nuanced symbolizations of the economic sphere that are at play in the financial plot and in the story of Arthur Clennam's professional development. The financial plot has a dual focus, revolving around both Merdle and Pancks; it is in relation to the latter that Dickens tests the resilience of speculation as a popular dream. Fuelled by the desire for social justice, this dream culminates in an act of "spectacular" rebellion—an "act of personal redemption," not a social revolution, as Fleishman points out (578)—that adds a positive dimension to risk-taking. The character that is willing to hazard all he has, gains a new life, emancipated from pre-modern forms of bondage still present in the capitalist world of *Little Dorrit*. This twist renders Dickens's take on international finance historically cogent: alerting Victorian readers to the incidence of financial crime is one thing; showing them how the fantasy of fast capitalism works in the minds of ordinary outsiders lured by the prospect of rapid change is a different and arguably more effective way of pinning down the potency of financial fictions. The novel embraces the moral lesson of individual responsibility by punishing Arthur for his speculation while ultimately redeeming Pancks. Speculation stands condemned when a middle-class character, actively involved in the industrial sphere, attempts a leap forward towards the illicit goal of unearned wealth, but the same fantasy appears less illusory when experienced by a character that has not yet been granted the kind of bourgeois freedom that Arthur already enjoys.

Arthur Clennam's story suggests that crucial distinctions between good and bad capitalism can and ought to be drawn; in this respect, the novel is attuned to mainstream public discourses about business, management, and finance that insisted on the moral question.²¹ Reading *Little Dorrit* alongside Walter Bagehot's 1857 essay on the *Crédit Mobilier* (joint-stock company), one is struck by the similarities in the final lesson both authors derive from their very different explorations of modern commerce: "As times go," writes Bagehot, "the making of money by work is perhaps the most innocent employment of man; but no passion is so dangerous as an avarice which is at the same time inactive and intense" (283). But Dickens's novel insinuates doubts about the possibility of differentiating between "innocent employment" and "avarice." Arthur's indictment of the "plunder" he identifies with Clennam and Co., his belief that there is something wrong, or evil, in the "machinery" of business is the kind of knowledge that allows him (paradoxically) to renew his participation in the same game, to choose business once again under the new auspices of a project of reparation that he will only carry out on the emotional, affective level, as Tamara Wagner claims (103). The central consciousness in the narrative is in the thrall of ideology, as Žižek redefines it: "I know very well, but still . . ." (*Sublime* 12). This reading gives precedence to minor episodes or scenes—Flora's comments on the Works, for instance—in which the fantasy of goodness that serves to support Arthur's reality shows some cracks. This does not imply that the main pattern of meanings is disrupted. Daniel Doyce and his branch of industry are described, from

first to last, in entirely positive terms. But it is Arthur's perceptions and experiences that frame the narrative and guide the reader's approach to the imagined world of the novel. By making the subject-position Arthur inhabits uncomfortable and beset by a persistent sense of "liberal guilt" (Born 29), Dickens tests the limits of his character's (and possibly his own) belief in the moral critique of capitalism. The ubiquitous feeling of entrapment in *Little Dorrit* is contingent upon "its deeply pessimistic analysis of mid-Victorian economics" (Herbert 196). Central to this analysis is the role played by Arthur Clennam's occluded knowledge, which is functional to his reinsertion in the system of economic production. The focus on this process—rather than any direct reference to financial details or technological inventions—defines the scope of Dickens's (bleak) realism.

University of Macerata

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²¹ Whether market values could be reconciled with ethical imperatives, and economic efficiency with morality, was the object of much debate throughout the nineteenth century. Searle provides an excellent overview of various attempts to moralize the market. See also Robb on criminal capitalism and Taylor on the highly controversial reception of the principle of limited liability.

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES AND CHINESE LITERARY HISTORY BY KLAUDIA HIU YEN LEE

Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) was first translated by Wei Yi and published in the Chinese bi-monthly political journal, *The Justice*. Established on 1 December 1912 by Liang Qichao (1873-1929), one of the most influential Chinese intellectuals of the day, *The Justice* was noted for its anti-revolutionary stance. Why, then, did it feature Dickens's novel of revolution in the wake of the 1911 Revolution and the founding of the Chinese Republic?¹ The Chinese publication of *Tale* at this historic juncture has a particular significance to Chinese politics, one differing markedly from the Victorian socio-political context of its 1859 publication in Dickens's *All the Year Round*. This discussion considers the translation, publication, and circulation of Dickens's novels in the cultural and historic contexts of early twentieth-century China, with a special focus on *A Tale of Two Cities*. A comparison of the original text and the Chinese translation reveals culture-specific socio-political agendas, especially those pertaining to the portrayal of the mob and the characterization of Madame Defarge.

The Chinese translation of *A Tale of Two Cities* reflected Chinese intellectuals' continuing interest in Dickens since the introduction of his work in the country. Between 1907 and 1914, seven of Dickens's novels were translated and published in China, including *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39) and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41) in 1907, *David Copperfield* (1849-50) and *Oliver Twist* (1837-39) in 1908, *Dombey and Son* (1846-48) in 1909, *Little Dorrit* (1855-57) in 1910, and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) in June 1913 to February 1914.² Except for the latter, which was serialized in thirteen instalments in *The Justice*, all these novels were first brought out by the Commercial Press in Shanghai. Although little information is available regarding the number of copies of each title published or the sale-price of the novels, the fact that Dickens's novels were often published in several editions and in different formats in their initial cross-cultural transfer suggests a healthy demand for his works. For example, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, first published as part of "shuobu [stories] series," was reprinted four times between 1907 and 1915 by the Commercial Press in Shanghai. In February 1914, the novel was published in pocket size, followed by another edition that was part of Lin's translation series in June the same year. *Dombey and Son* was also published under the "shuobu series" (subsequently in three editions), "small-pocket novels" (two editions), and "Lin's translation series" (one edition) respectively, between 1909 and 1914.

What characterized this initial publishing phase of Dickens translations was the social function his work was expected to assume. This stemmed partly from the fact that Dickens

¹ The 1911 Revolution resulted in the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) with the abdication of Emperor Puyi on 12 February 1912. Sun Yat-sen assumed office as "provisional president" of the Chinese Republic on 1 January 1912. For more on this turbulent history, see Spence (258-77).

² On Chinese translations of Dickens's novels, see *Bibliography of Publications during the Republic Period 1911-1949*, compiled from collections in Beijing, Shanghai, and Chongqing libraries; however, this resource does not feature novels published in journals or periodicals. See also Tong. Citations are from Tang's 2010 reprint of *The Justice*. Unless otherwise stated, English translations of Chinese texts cited here are my own.

was widely seen by the intellectuals as a social reformer during this first phase of cross-cultural transfer; it was also due to a general conviction shared among many intellectuals that it was prose fiction, instead of poetry and historical writings—long regarded “high art” in the Chinese literary scene—that could be used to advance their political and social causes. The utilitarian value intellectuals attached to prose fiction, and to translations in particular, underpinned their heightened sense of urgency for national reform, which was beset with a series of domestic problems and external threats from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. These threats included the two Opium Wars in the 1840s and 1850s, the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, the failure of the Hundred Days’ Reform in 1898, and the Boxer Rebellion in 1900.³ The role of prose fiction in these nation-building exercises was captured succinctly by Liang who, in “Foreword to the Publication of Political Novels in Translation,” pointed out the power of prose fiction by emphasizing that novels are read by people from all walks of life:

A newly published book could often influence and change the views and arguments of the whole nation. Indeed, Political novels should be given the highest credit for being instrumental in the steady progress made in the political sphere in America, England, Germany, France, Austria, Italy and Japan. (qtd. Denton 71)

Liang’s idea of political novels was based on the Japanese model that he encountered during his exile after the 1898 Reform movement.⁴ As Hiroko Willcock notes, the political novel can be broadly defined as a novel which “deals with political ideas, or which analyses political phenomena, or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting” (817). Willcock suggests that “in a narrow sense it must at the same time express a positive direction towards the improvement of the existing social and political milieu”; it is the latter view with which Liang was primarily concerned and which he propagandized in China.⁵

Dickens’s popularity among Chinese intellectuals reflects his role as a social reformer foregrounding social problems through “realistic” portrayals of Victorian “malpractices.” This interpretation was evident in a preface written by Lin Shu (1852-1924), a key figure in translating Dickens’s texts into classical Chinese:

England might seem so strong and powerful that it has almost become the focus of attention from countries around the globe, and its conduct has been deemed worthy of serving as the world’s model. How would anyone know that England still has thieves’ dens if Dickens had not described them in his novel? And yet the reason for England’s strength resides in its ability to accept good advice and reform itself accordingly. . . . What I regret is that there is no one like Dickens who can cite age-old malpractices and dramatize them in novels in order to inform the government of their existence. (qtd. Denton 82-83)

Such a portrayal of Dickens as a Victorian whistle-blower was made against a strong conviction among Chinese intellectuals, including Lin, that only by carrying out fully-fledged reforms could national rejuvenation be achieved. Lin’s representation of England

³ See also *The Cambridge History of China* II (Late Ching, 1800-1911, Part 2).

⁴ Japanese influence on Liang can be seen in his adoption of both the Chinese Republican and Japanese calendars on the cover of *The Justice* (Fig. 1).

⁵ During the late Qing period, Chinese students and intellectuals were heavily influenced by Japanese literature and translations of foreign works. See Willcock (817-40).

as a “strong and powerful” country beset with many social problems reflected intellectuals’ mixed perceptions of Britain. While British imperialism had forced open China’s door to the West, many Chinese intellectuals found in the British political structure—constitutional monarchy—a model which China could follow.⁶ Many intellectuals of the time, such as Liang, were noted for their admiration of British social and political systems.⁷ Moreover, as Marston Anderson points out, the term “realism” was introduced into China in two stages: first in the context of Chinese intellectuals’ efforts toward national rejuvenation and later as part of the May Fourth campaign for “enlightenment.” Anderson contends that the reason why realism particularly appealed to Chinese intellectuals was that it appeared to be “the most progressive of Western aesthetic modes, in part because of its scientism, in part because realist works took as their subjects a far wider range of social phenomena than earlier, more aristocratic forms did” (25).⁸ Yet, while the publication of *A Tale of Two Cities* in China reflected intellectuals’ general interest in Dickens and the social phenomena he portrayed, the special avenue through which it was published suggests additional political implications worth exploring.

That *A Tale of Two Cities* was chosen for publication in an overtly political journal was probably due to the fact that its subject matter—the French Revolution—had a particular political currency, since China had yet to emerge fully from the shadow of the 1911 Revolution. It is, however, important to note that the Chinese Revolution differed fundamentally from that of the French Revolution, both in terms of its organization and the underlying causes that led to the overthrow of the existing regime. The French Revolution was widely understood to result from acute class antagonism between the callous aristocratic ruling class and the exploited masses (mainly peasants), the latter becoming a powerful and destructive force leading to the ultimate toppling of the aristocratic regime. The 1911 Revolution, in contrast, was mainly led by overseas Chinese intellectuals who had witnessed first-hand the benefits of modernization by countries such as Japan, which had defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895.⁹ This defeat, which many Chinese deemed a national humiliation, made many intellectuals realize that change was necessary if the country was to survive in the modern era. The failure of the Hundred Days’ Reform movement in 1898 led to the realization that the reluctance of the Qing court to carry out reforms necessitated a more radical path to change and transformation: revolution. The debate between reform and revolution had long dominated Chinese intellectual and political discussions at the turn of the century and prior to the 1911 Revolution. As Xiaobing Tang notes, as early as the summer of 1898, just before the Hundred Days’ Reform, Kang had compiled a brief history of the French Revolution and submitted it to the Guangxu Emperor as a warning of what would happen if no serious and systematic reforms were instituted.¹⁰ In their debates over whether revolution was the way ahead for China, both the reformists (the constitutionalists) and the revolutionaries made use of the

⁶ See *The Cambridge History of China* for a discussion of Sino-Britain relations (274-83).

⁷ See Huang (68-83) on the influence of foreign political systems on Liang.

⁸ See Anderson on realism in China (1-26). See C. T. Hsia (3-27) for the influence of Western literary movements on Chinese literature.

⁹ For a discussion of the 1911 Revolution, see Spence 253-63.

¹⁰ See Tang on China’s *fin de siècle* reform-and-revolution debates, emphasizing Liang’s political views and modernization (80-116).

French Revolution to launch their respective propaganda wars through the newspapers.¹¹ These included *New Citizen Journal* (1902-07), founded by Liang, and *Citizens Journal* (or *Min Pao*) (1905-08), founded by Tongmenghui (United League). Tongmenghui was a revolutionary organization formed by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, one of the leading revolutionary leaders credited with the success of the 1911 Revolution.

While the revolutionaries, led by Sun, advocated revolution to achieve a republican state, Liang and other reformers argued that a revolution would lead to bloodshed, induce foreign intervention and, ultimately, the disintegration of China by foreign forces.¹² Such varied appropriations of the French Revolution in Chinese politics demonstrated that this historical event had received attention in China even before the publication of *A Tale of Two Cities*, a circumstance adding further credence to the novel's political function in the aftermath of the Revolution.

It is important to consider the politics of *The Justice* in order to understand why certain changes were introduced to the original text during translation. Clearly, the medium through which a text is transmitted at a particular historic moment shapes the way it is read and interpreted. This view concurs with Laurel Brake's argument that nineteenth-century writings should be read in terms of their original print contexts, especially that of the British periodical culture of the time.¹³ Given the political nature of the journal, the early twentieth-century Chinese readers of *A Tale of Two Cities* were most likely to be those educated elites who supported the political views which Liang advocated and presented in *The Justice*. In a preface outlining the significance of a reprint edition of *The Justice* in 2010, the editor, Tang Zhijun, suggests that the periodical was a means by which Liang could propagate the political views of *Jin Bu Dang*, or the Progressive Party, which was formally founded in May 1913 through the merger of three political parties, including *Gong He Dang*, of which Liang was a member. Liang was appointed the Progressive Party's secretary and subsequently minister of justice for its shadow cabinet.¹⁴ Although little publication information (print run and sales) is available, various accounts of Liang's warm reception in China on returning from Japan testify to his reputation as one of the most influential intellectuals of the day. It is thus likely that the journal appealed to fellow intellectuals and followers of the political principles Liang advocated.¹⁵

Liang's belief in the use of journalism to educate the public and to propagate his ideas led him to establish numerous periodicals and journals, including *Zhongwai Gongbao*, *Shiwu Bao*, *Qing Yi Bao*, *New Citizen*, and *New Fiction* (which published translated literature along with that of native writers) during his exile in Japan.¹⁶ Although Liang is widely seen

¹¹ English radicals like Thomas Paine saw the French Revolution as a model for the complete overthrow of the state, while conservatives like James Mackintosh saw it as an aberration. For conservatives, the "true" meaning of revolution was embodied in the 1688 Glorious Revolution, which restored the English Parliament; this attests to the tradition of reform in England's historical development. See Woodcock (1-30).

¹² See Zhang for a succinct summary of the arguments from both sides (137-67).

¹³ Brake (1-83) argues this point most strongly in the case of critical writings published in British periodicals, though her analyses can also apply to literary works more generally.

¹⁴ See Tang (1-4).

¹⁵ Returning to Beijing after exile in Japan, Liang gave speeches every day for twelve days. See *The Biography of Liang Qichao*, eds. Yao Li and Li Jing (63).

¹⁶ Liang used journalism to propagate his political ideas; see Levenson and Huang. This study adopts the pinyin system of Mandarin Chinese for the spelling of Chinese words, names, and titles. In cases where the titles and the direct quotes of the texts follow the Taiwanese pinyin system, I use the authors' chosen spellings, as with the titles of Levenson and Huang's monographs that spell Liang Qichao as "Liang Chi-chao."

as a reformist who played a crucial role in engaging debates with the revolutionaries on the applicability of revolution to China's historical development, his political views were not static. His short-lived cooperation with Sun in his early political career had shown his preference for a republication revolution. However, from 1903 onwards he increasingly believed that only by adopting a constitutional monarchy modelled on the examples of countries like England, Germany, and Japan could China maintain stability and move towards modernity.¹⁷ Yet with the downfall of the Qing dynasty, Liang changed his politics again and gave full backing to the Republic. In a speech delivered to a delegation of journalists on 22 October 1912 (subsequently published in the founding issue of *The Justice* on 1 December 1912), Liang defended his new political orientation by drawing a distinction between *guoti* (polity) and *zhengti* (regime). He pointed out that it had often been the reformists' goal to impose constitutional constraints on the government so as to protect peoples' civil rights rather than seeking to overthrow the existing polity: "The constitutionalists have never wavered in their support of the polity, thus it's just natural that they now support the Republican polity under a constitutional regime" (Liang 78).¹⁸ In "The reasons behind the continuity of revolutions and their dire consequences" (*The Justice*, 16 June 1913), Liang warns his countrymen against indulging in revolutionary activities by highlighting the various uprisings still occurring throughout China after the formation of the Republic. The negative consequences of such actions, he pointed out, are demonstrated by frequent changes of ruling regimes and revolutionary outbreaks in the eighty years that followed the first French Revolution as well as those that occurred in Mexico and Portugal. He asserts that "revolutions will only breed revolutions but they will not lead to improved politics"—meaning, the establishment of formal institutions and mechanisms that would limit the power of those individuals who had dictatorial tendencies (Liang 2540). He contends that the power, wealth, and status revolutionaries quickly attain increase their yearnings for more power and privileges, while the resulting socio-economic destruction generates more discontent and more revolutions.

The anti-revolutionary political agenda underlining the Chinese translation of *A Tale of Two Cities* contrasts with that of 1859 England, when Chartism and the Second Reform Bill were primary issues. The Chartist movement dates from 1838, with protests and campaigns (some violent) demanding that requests under the "People's Charter" be met,¹⁹ including enfranchising all male adults over twenty-one and cancelling the property requirement for members of Parliament. Dickens's concern with Chartists and working-class militancy resonates with such contemporaries as Thomas Carlyle. In *Chartism* (1839), Carlyle coins the phrase the "Condition of England" by drawing readers' attention to socio-economic disparities and working-class grievances. Describing the working-class as possessing the "wrong disposition," Carlyle argues that they should be "guided and governed" so as to contain the destructive potential of the discontented masses (3). In 1848, the movement lost much of its momentum and unifying force, in part, notes Gareth Stedman-Jones, because it lacked the support of the recently (1832) enfranchised middle-class.²⁰

¹⁷ Liang's short-lived cooperation with Sun is one of the most cited episodes by scholars to prove his earlier, radical political views. See the monographs of Tang, Levenson, and Huang.

¹⁸ The cited quotes by Liang are in Chinese. See Liang, *The Justice*, 1 December 1912.

¹⁹ See Ward (111-42) for a discussion of the sporadic violent protests during the Chartist movement.

²⁰ See Stedman-Jones (90-178).

Carlyle's position on mob-mentality aligns with the conservatism of Edmund Burke in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). For Burke, the political structures established in the name of revolution were attempts by the unscrupulous and uneducated masses to usurp the power of the state, thereby subverting the natural order and the constitutional foundation on which nations are built and sustained.²¹ Burke's views were famously refuted at the time by Thomas Paine, who asserted the legitimacy of the National Assembly of France—and by extension, the will of the people—in the *Rights of Man* (1791). Paine argues for people's "inherent rights"—election, representation, and participation—by highlighting the dictatorial nature of a monarchy, an institution established by conquest, contrasted with an elected assembly representing the will of the people. In other words, Paine was deeply critical of the way English critics—and particularly Burke—attempted to deny the legitimacy of the political goals of the revolutionaries.²²

While Dickens's depiction of the violent mob in *A Tale of Two Cities* suggests a political conservatism reminiscent of Burke and Carlyle, his sympathy with the working class distinguishes his narrative from Carlyle's.²³ By extension, although Dickens contrasts the humane, domestic qualities of the mob with its cruelty and irrationality as revolutionaries, the Chinese translation foregrounds mob violence to strengthen the anti-revolutionary message. Contrasting images of the mob members before and after they purge their common enemy, Foulon (a fictional representation of the Councillor of State to Louis XVI), are revealing:

The men were terrible, in the bloody-minded anger with which they looked from windows, caught up what arms they had, and came pouring down into the streets; but, the women were a sight to chill the boldest. From such household occupations as their bare poverty yielded, from their children, from their aged and their sick crouching on the bare ground famished and naked, they ran out with streaming hair, urging one another, and themselves, to madness with the wildest cries and actions. (Dickens 433-34)

The demeanor of the "mob" undergoes a drastic change when they finish daytime revolutionary activities and return to their loved ones in the evening:

Not before dark night did the men and women come back to the children, wailing and breathless. Then, the miserable bakers' shops were beset by long files of them, patiently waiting to buy bad bread; and while they waited with stomachs faint and empty, they beguiled the time by embracing one another on the triumphs of the day, and achieving them again in gossip. Gradually, these strings of ragged people shortened and frayed away; and then poor lights began to shine in high windows, and slender fires were made in the streets, at which neighbours cooked in common, afterwards supping at their doors. Scanty and insufficient suppers, those, and innocent of meat, as of most other sauce to wretched bread. Yet, human fellowship infused some nourishment into the flinty viands, and struck some sparks of

²¹ See Burke (275-76).

²² See Paine (39-115).

²³ On Dickens's intellectual indebtedness to Carlyle, see Glancy (31-37) and Maxwell (399-443).

cheerfulness out of them. Fathers and mothers who had had their full share in the worst of the day, played gently with their meagre children; and lovers, with such a world around them and before them, loved and hoped.

The Chinese translation envisions the episode thus:

Not before nightfall did people start to return to their village. As dinner was not yet ready, a crowd lined up in front of the bakery waiting to buy bread. Although everybody was starving and weak, they still embraced and congratulated each other on killing the enemy and gaining the victory, and found amusing the description of the deaths of old-man Foulon and his son-in-law. After getting the bread, they lit fires, and each warmed up his food in the fire. Although the food they ate was crude, their stories on the killing of enemies made the food more palpable [sic]. Women played with their children on their knees, and lovers whispered sweet nothings. But each one thought that though the current situation was not rosy, in the future the government of France would be under their control. Hence, there was no need to fear poverty, since the future held out hope for them. (Wei 3872)

The image of a bloodthirsty mob in the original version is clearly a rendition of the contemporary idea of revolutionary change, one which, since 1789, had become largely associated with violence and a break from the past.²⁴ Women's participation in the revolution presents "a sight to chill the boldest" because of their double transgression: by entering the public sphere they have transgressed the "natural" role of women as the guardians of morality and domesticity.²⁵ Yet the sense of fellowship and support that prevails when the revolutionaries resume their domestic chores in the evening demonstrates that their monstrous actions during the day are more a result of their abject despair than an intrinsic quality. Humanity is demonstrated through the performance of domestic activities, such as child-care, cooking, and communal meals; it is also reflected in the crowd's patience while queuing for "bad bread" even though their stomachs are "faint and empty." Their humanity is further emphasized by Dickens's description of their demeanor during supper, a picture of love and hope through the interaction and support between family members, despite the lack of material comforts; clearly, those who live in the revolutionary era have no choice but to have "their full share in the worst of the day," whose conditions are forced upon them. Domestic activities, such as cooking, are conducted in the streets on "slender fires," due to scarcity of resources and lack of domestic comfort ("bare poverty"); but this does not diminish their value, morality and virtue being preserved in the very performance of domesticity. As Gaston Bachelard notes in *The Poetics of Space*, it is difficult to draw a clear, geometrical boundary between public and private domains, the thresholds of which are often determined by individual perception rather than by a strict demarcation of physical boundaries (211-31).²⁶ The distinction between public and private in revolutionary

²⁴ See Woodcock (1-30) for a discussion of the changing meaning of revolution for Britain since the 1789 French Revolution.

²⁵ Women are often portrayed as the guardians of domesticity in Victorian literature; see Parker (1-24) and Cohen (100-24).

²⁶ See Bachelard (211-31)

Paris, then, is not so much about the actual space in which activities take place but rather the symbolic values attached to the acts being described. What is lost in the Chinese translation is exactly this subtle demarcation between public and private, since it stresses not domesticity but murder—indeed, reminiscing about Toulon's death makes bad food more "palpable"; the revolutionaries' monstrous day-time behavior extends into the night, even into the domestic realm, and there is little sense of that "forced" foray in the original version. This emphasis drastically undercuts the redemptive domestic morality central to Dickens's portrayal of ordinary humans forced into dehumanizing circumstances.

The contrast between the original and translated versions is also manifested in the conflicted representation of Madame Defarge, a female revolutionary leader in the novel:

She stood immovable close to the grim old officer, and remained immovable close to him; remained immovable close to him through the streets, as Defarge and the rest bore him along; remained immovable close to him when he was got near his destination, and began to be struck at from behind; remained immovable close to him when the long-gathering rain of stabs and blows fell heavy; was so close to him when he dropped dead under it, that, suddenly animated, she put her foot upon his neck, and with her cruel knife—long ready—hewed off his head. (Dickens 413)

Her brutality and vengeful determination contrast sharply with the image of Lucia Nanette, whose constancy and femininity are the perfect embodiment of the angelic domestic goddess of the Victorian—and particularly Dickens's—imagination.²⁷ Yet Madame Defarge's revenge is both public and private, for her hatred stems from the destruction of her family by the Evrémonde brothers (who raped her sister and killed her brother; as a result, her father died of grief and shock), yet the revolutionary activities that she engages in are public, leading to the downfall of the aristocratic regime. Madame Defarge thus epitomizes the tension between a public and private course of action, a major theme in *A Tale of Two Cities*. This tension reveals the perils of a callous regime for the individual, further illustrated by Dickens's representation of her final moments in life—that is, before she is accidentally killed by Miss Pross in a scuffle:

Of a strong and fearless character, of shrewd sense and readiness, of great determination, of that kind of beauty which not only seems to impart to its possessor firmness and animosity . . . the troubled time would have heaved her up, under any circumstances. But, imbued from her childhood with a brooding sense of wrong, and an inveterate hatred of a class, opportunity had developed her into a tigress. She was absolutely without pity. If she had ever had the virtue in her, it had quite gone out of her . . . It was nothing to her, that an innocent man was to die for the sins of his forefathers; she saw, not him, but them. (Dickens 70)

By highlighting that "brooding sense of wrong" since her childhood and her "inveterate hatred" towards the ruling class, Dickens suggests that Madame Defarge's brutality is not innate but rather developed and reinforced by the injustices suffered by her

²⁷ Slater (307-15) argues that Dickens's women characters often assume the role of a "natural priest" enabling male characters to achieve moral improvement.

family, as well as the public at large. The "opportunity" of making her into a "tigress," meanwhile, could only occur in a society where law and order are replaced by violence, and where people's survival depends upon irrational mass action on the spur of the moment. Equally important, or perhaps even more so, is the failure of Madame Defarge to realize the difference between individuals and the class to which they belong; what she sees in an innocent man who is to die for "the sins of his forefathers" is "not him, but them." It is also significant that as one who is often surrounded by fellow revolutionaries and her husband, Madame Defarge is alone in her final moments. When approaching the apartment where Lucie is supposed to live, her tread is no longer subsumed under the echoing footsteps that reverberate through the poverty-stricken Saint Antoine; instead, it is distinguishable because it is a "confident tread" that illustrates the "supple freedom of a woman who had habitually walked in her girlhood, bar-foot and bare-legged, on the brown sea-sand" (Dickens 70).

Here is Dickens's original version:

Such a heart Madame Defarge carried under her rough robe. Carelessly worn, it was a becoming robe enough, in a certain weird way, and her dark hair looked rich under her coarse red cap. Lying hidden in her bosom, was a loaded pistol. Lying hidden at her waist, was a sharpened dagger. Thus accoutred, and walking with the confident tread of such a character, and with the supple freedom of a woman who had habitually walked in her girlhood, bare-foot and bare-legged, on the brown sea-sand, Madame Defarge took her way along the streets. (70)

And the Chinese translation:

With a pistol in her bosom and a dagger in her waist, Madame Defarge walked into the city with her head held high. Everybody who saw her felt startled and scared. (Wei 21)

The image of a girl walking on the sand barefoot and bare-legged illustrates the difficult conditions under which she lived; it evokes sympathy towards one who has never experienced true love and care and points to the irretrievable innocence of the past. Such a victimized, helpless image of a member of the exploited class thus stands in sharp contrast with her public image as a revolutionary fighter, as highlighted by her attire; her carelessly-worn robe, her coarse red cap and the weapons that she holds suggests that Dickens may have appropriated the image of the goddess-like figure of liberty in "La Liberté Guidant le Peuple" (Liberty Leading the People) by Eugène Delacroix, painted to commemorate the 1830 July Revolution. Here, Liberty is personified by a bare-breasted female militant fighter, dressed in a red Phrygian cap and loose robe; holding the French tricolour flag in one hand and a bayoneted musket with the other, she leads the people forward over piles of corpses.²⁸ The contrasting representations of Madame Defarge in the final moments of her life thus foreground the central question of *A Tale of Two Cities*: who is to blame for the monstrous actions of Madame Defarge and, by extension, the mob? The Chinese translation reduces the complexity of her character, and eliminates the tension between her public image (a revolutionary fighter) and private (a socio-cultural victim); by retaining only those descriptions relating to masculinity and violence—the pistol and dagger she

²⁸ On liberty cap symbolism, see Wrigley (131-69); on Liberty's sexuality, see Brown (237-54).

carries and her confidence walking through the city—the Chinese translation eliminates the inherent contradictions of the character as well as the deeper questions Dickens raises. These alterations in Madame Defarge's characterization, together with the representation of the mob, point to the transformed politics in the translated work, an aspect of which was underlined by the politics of *The Justice*. While the changes underscore alternative readings of the novel and attempts to make it more relevant to Chinese readers, they also highlight the intricate relationship between the reception of a literary text and the wider socio-political condition of the target culture (in this case, the aftermath of the Chinese Revolution of 1911) to which the text was transferred.

University of Nottingham

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CHARLES DICKENS AND HABLOT K. BROWNE:
CROSS-NARRATIVE CREATION AND COLLABORATION IN
BLEAK HOUSE

BY AILEEN FARRAR

Exploring questions of personal identity in *Bleak House* (1852-53) requires negotiating and confronting the inherent limitations that objective / subjective and textual / pictorial descriptions pose to that identity. Dickens is known for proliferating cultural binaries, exposing dichotomies within stratified class systems, geographic rifts, and gender norms in his novels. Yet, at the same time, he challenges and demonstrates the elasticity of those limits. *Bleak House*, one of Dickens's most multi-layered novels, experiments with dualities—urbanity and rurality, affluence and poverty, propriety and scandal—as well as with a bifurcated narrative structure shared by Esther Summerson Woodcourt, the first-person, retrospective narrator, and an unnamed, third-person, omniscient narrator.

This narrative dualism, compounded by Hablot Knight Browne's forty illustrations, creates modern and postmodern bifurcations that require investigation of the book's pluralities, the collaboration of text and image being just one means of producing multiple perspectives, character relationships, and plots. Yet few studies focus on the epistemological phenomenon that *Bleak House* presents. Beyond the duality of narration purveyed by the objective and subjective textual narrators, beyond the pairing of illustration and text Robert Patten dubs "old news" ("Serial" 121), are another pair of narrators talking within Browne's illustrated pictorial narration.

The dialogue between Dickens's and Browne's objective and subjective textual and pictorial narratives smudges the boundaries of epistemological reality and probes the period's confrontation between power and self. Beginning with the subjective perspective, Dickens manifests the limitations of subjectivity through Esther's story, illustrating how bias, mixed with finite experiences and imperfect memory, curbs her individual perspective. While shedding light on other characters' failings and short-sightedness, Esther fails to recognize how her own actions, like her engagement to Mr. Jarndyce, "overshadow" her sense of self (Dickens 690). When she reads Jarndyce's proposal, she faces the mirror and weeps: "I cried . . . as if something for which there was no name or distinct idea were indefinitely lost to me. I was very happy, very thankful, very hopeful; but I cried very much" (692). Vaguely recognizing a quiet intuition that warns her against marrying Jarndyce, she still positively fails to identify the concrete reason that sits directly in front of her in the mirror. She is the something with "no name." As she wags her finger berating herself, her action anticipates the finger pointing toward Mr. Tulkinghorn's dead body, and Bucket's finger directing characters toward and away from solutions to the mystery.¹ Here, Esther points toward a threatened reflection of herself marked by shattered emotions and tears. She fears that, if she marries Jarndyce, she will no longer be Esther but a one-dimensional Dame Durden, Dame Trot, or some other flattened version of her identity. The complexity and nuances of her being are at risk; and yet, confined by social prescriptions, she sees marriage with Jarndyce as a duty. Wiping her tears, Esther shakes her

¹ Ronald Thomas discusses Mr. Bucket as the embodiment of a camera, noting the investigator's finger "direct[s] others to look in a certain place, to see what he sees in the way that he sees it" (142).

keys as a reminder that she must be grateful and happy; like many, she is blind to the needs of the one person she should know best: herself.

The objective angle poses barriers to self-growth as well. *Bleak House* and its multifaceted capacities show that one must be able to negotiate boundaries to establish identity. In the nineteenth century, these negotiations were complicated by ruptures in communication and epistemology broadened by advancements in technology. In the 1830s, the new photographic techniques developed by Louis Daguerre and Henry Fox Talbot galvanized critical questions about perception. The camera became a symbol that captured Victorians' desire to depict the external world in increasingly objective—impersonal, accurate, and limitless—ways.² Objectivity in this case begins with an eternal and external reality. However, quick to understand the inevitable paradox, Victorians soon realized that the camera only essentially magnifies the subjectivity of the human eye that directs it. Other optical devices produced by the booming visual culture—the kaleidoscope, stereoscope, and phenakistoscope³—reiterate this notion of subjective creativity and show that, rather than observing an objective world, the self actively produces its own "sense of being-in-the-world" (Plunkett 226). As Gilles Deleuze explains, "machines are social before being technical" (34); they are designed for and shaped by the social and philosophical zeitgeists of a period. Thus the Victorian camera challenged the enlightenment views of positivism and empiricism of previous decades and interrogated people's ability to see and depict a consistent tangible universe (Crary 9).

Still, the advent of the camera fostered a stubborn hope to possess worldly knowledge,⁴ a hope Dickens translates into his own brand of early literary realism and common mythology of epistemology. Discussed today in terms of plurality—of narrative style, tones, authorial personas, plots, pre-writes, and potential endings⁵—*Bleak House* and its oft criticized decentralized story, mass of characters, and tangle of intertwined and parallel plots are paradigms of a kind of realism that simulates the confusion, density, and multiplicity of life. In creating realities, Dickens conducts himself as omnipotent maker of a fictive universe. John Sutherland notes, "Victorians . . . sentimentally [perceived] his great brain as an inexhaustible generator of visual imagery. He did not write, he 'created'" (111). Seeing the world through his own lenses, like a camera, Dickens conceived objective totalities.

In fact, portrayal of a complete, stable, eternal, and external reality requires in the positivist sense an objective entity capable of creating it. This is a relatively old idea. René Descartes applies it in *Discourse on the Method* (1637) when he argues that there is a real and absolute world outside the human mind from which all human knowledge is derived and that humans can be certain of the absoluteness of the real world because

² See John Plunkett for a history of the camera and its influences on literary realism (223-25). See Thomas for an analysis of the camera as a tool and metaphor for Victorian visuality (134-68). The idea of an objective reality far precedes that of empirical modern science; see Aristotle's *Ars Poetica*. See also M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* on linking poetry, nature, and human consciousness.

³ Phenakistoscope: a circular device on which an image is sequentially reproduced, each one varying slightly from the previous; when spun, it conveys the illusion of animation (an early form of "flip-book").

⁴ On objective observation, see Francis Crick and Christof Koch (263-75). Also, see Lodge on the idea that the objective world is always articulated and shaped by subjective eyes (7).

⁵ See Bowen and Patten (2006) on the "multitudes of Dickens"—of "texts, lives, achievements, and readerships" (2). See also in this collection Bowen (255-72), Schor (90-110), Patten (11-47), and Bradbury (152-66).

God is absolute; that is, He exists and He is perfect (32). Overlooking the tautological reasoning that takes place, the importance here is that Descartes cannot conceive of a stable, eternal reality without an omniscient, infinite super-being. Similarly, it was common in the nineteenth century to accept fictional worlds as objective realities created by an objective entity: the author. Later critics and writers would learn to separate the two—author and text—Roland Barthes's famous essay, "Death of the Author" (1967), being a known climax of this effort. However, with the realization of broader scientific possibilities, nineteenth-century literature, like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), exploded with the imaginings of godly power wielded by the human drive to create.

In this way, objectivity in its textual and pictorial dimensions assumes godly and thus inhuman characteristics, Browne's dark plate illustrations being a case in point. Browne developed the dark plate technique that gives *Bleak House* its dual imagistic style while working on Charles Lever's *Roland Cashel* (1848-49). He used them again in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), but it was with *Bleak House* that Browne was finally able to promote the gloomy etchings as a "center of interest" (Harvey 151-52). Despite the sudden appearance of the dark plates midway through the novel, their presence actually works to illuminate "the darkening story of Lady Dedlock" planned from the novel's beginning (Slater 341); and, with the two pictorial styles together—a dark plate technique juxtaposed with lighter lithographic etchings—come the voices of two pictorial narrators, one objective and the other subjective, much like those of the textual narratives.

While many have commented on the binary arrangement constructed by Esther and the third-person narrator, few have studied Browne's dual style in his illustrations and even fewer have compared the two. An exception is John Jordan, who applies Mieke Bal's concept of focalization in verbal narratives to Browne's illustrations and explains that each image has a focalizer(s) governed by an external viewpoint or character (27-28). In this way, he reveals the presence of two perspectives that resemble what this essay identifies as objective and subjective narratives. However, Jordan diverges from Bal by overlooking the distinction between etchings and dark plates to focus more on "external" and "character-based" perspectives, regardless of illustration technique. However, to comprehend the partnership between text and image, it is necessary to acknowledge and understand the full diegetic effects of variations in illustration methods—in other words, to examine the foil created by the dark plate and lithographic etchings.

In Browne's images, objectivity evidences a godly and inhuman supremacy that threatens to efface the selfhood of human beings. Whereas science demands the impersonal observation and accuracy provided by machines, the fictional world of *Bleak House* conceives detachment from subjectivity as a detachment from selfhood and all things associated with humanity—bias, flaws, weakness, and limitation. Consequently, an objective entity must be unbiased, potent, authoritative, and limitless. The best place to observe this force is in Browne's dark plate illustrations.

At first glance, the dark plates and their characteristic portal-shaped outlines seem to offer the prospect of omniscient insight. Dark plates are distinguished from plain lithographic etchings in *Bleak House* by their borders. While the etchings have ill-defined scratches that bleed into the white space of the page, the dark plates, because of the density of color yielded by the different technique, have definitive frames that mimic portal shapes. Each portal within and bordering the illustrations reticulates extra-textual

stories. For instance, the border of the first dark plate, "The Ghost's Walk" (Fig. 1), echoes the shape of the gateway to Captain Hawdon's graveyard from "The Morning" (Fig. 2) as well as the round-arched window at the top of the stairs in Chesney Wold depicted in "Shadow" (Fig. 3). In connecting the thresholds of each image, the illustrations invite the simultaneous backwards and forwards movement through the text that only an omniscient and atemporal eye could achieve, suggesting a fluidity between realms—the living and the dead, and public and private. Patten establishes a similar argument about Browne's illustrations, claiming that all of the pictures, dark plate and plain, invite this experimental structuring (120). However, the dark plates are, in this instance, especially productive as they overtly announce the metapictorial quality of the illustrations. The borders, shaped like picture frames and doorways, label the illustrations as portals into and between areas within the fictive reality of *Bleak House* and thus capture the potential for insight directed by an omniscient god-artist.⁶

Yet, while the dark plates seem to open epistemological doors, they also determine and injure human development. Out of ten dark plates, six are devoid of humans, and when humans are included, they are often shown from a distance and placed at the mercy of natural forces like darkness and snow. Similar to the oppressive fog described in the text as emanating from Chancery Court and stifling the inhabitants of London (Steig 149), these dark illustrated forces dominate the canvas and the huddling, barely visible, miniscule figures within. When a person is finally featured in the dark plates, it is Lady Dedlock, who is completely defeated by the night and cold, two merciless forces that, like the artist's gaze, dehumanize her. In "The Morning" (Fig. 2), as the night casts its bitter frost over her, the objective pictorial (OP) narrator captures her with his detached eye, stripping her of her life force and curling her corpse upon the steps of a graveyard like an animal seeking entrance to a welcoming abode. Likewise, in "Shadow" (Fig. 3), the darkness etched into the scene threatens to subsume Lady Dedlock's form at the same time that the whiteness erases the outline of her body, making her appear spectral, ghostly, and inhuman. As John Harvey observes, the dark plate emphasizes on gloomy scenes "reflect . . . the novel's general intimation of the pitiable helplessness and isolation of hounded human beings" (153). More specifically, it is the OP narrator who recounts these scenes and actualizes the marginalization and dehumanization of characters.

By subduing characters' bodies, the OP narrator manipulates viewers' perspectives. He may be omniscient, but he refuses to deliver the gift of sight to viewers. It is true that the

⁶ The term "god-artist" implicates the illustrator as a maker who is responsible for the constitution of a (fictive) reality. Some regard Browne a creator and collaborator rather than subordinate; he is "even an *artist*, sometimes creating independently valuable works of art" (Steig 3). The artist is associated with independent creation, just as the theory of objectivity explained earlier points to autonomy and creation as characteristics of an objective entity.

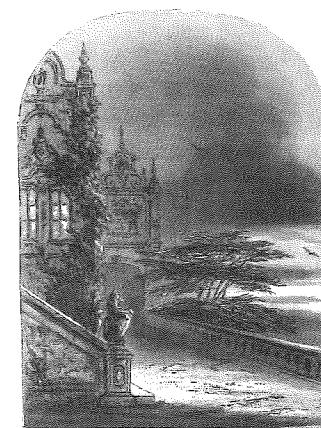


Fig. 1 "The Ghost's Walk"

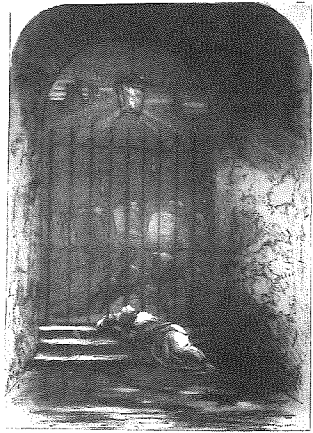


Fig. 2 "The Morning"



Fig. 3 "Shadow"

dark plate frames offer glimpses into scenes that few characters are privileged to witness. It is through the OP narrator's dark plates that intimate pictures of Lady Dedlock's demise (signified in "Shadow" [Fig. 3]), final journey ("The lonely figure" [Fig. 4]), and death ("The Morning" [Fig. 2] and "The Mausoleum at Chesney Wold" [Fig. 5]) are disclosed. However, rather than simply offer perspicacity as one might expect, the threshold defined by the frames of the illustrations demands power not just over characters' bodies but viewers' perspectives as well. Just as Dickens generates a fictive reality populated by characters, the pictorial god-artist occludes details, redefining scenes described in the text and moreover turning a blind eye to the presence of humans that are inscribed into scenes by the text. Thus Esther, Allan Woodcourt, and London investigators are all elided from their rightful places in the dark plate depictions "The Ghost's Walk" (Fig. 1), "Tom All-Along's" (Fig. 6), and "A new meaning in the Roman" (Fig. 7) (584-86; 708-11; 750-51). In some plates, the overwhelming darkness can even make it difficult to discern bodies, especially at times when it is crucial to know where Lady Dedlock is, such as in "The lonely figure" (Fig. 4)

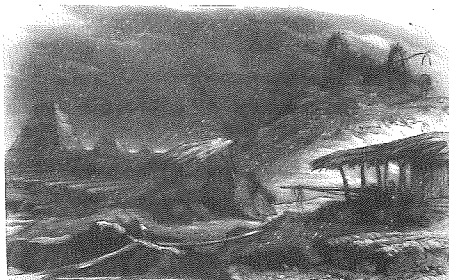
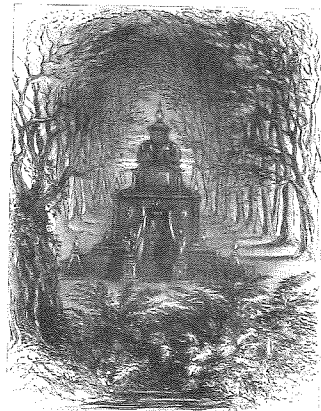
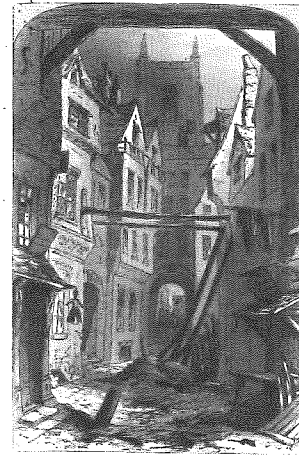


Fig. 4 "The lonely figure"

Fig. 5
"The Mausoleum at Chesney Wold"Fig. 6
"Tom All-Along's"Fig. 7
"A new meaning in the Roman"

and "The Night" (Fig. 8), and in original frames, which tend to be darker, distinction becomes nearly impossible.⁷ So unclear is Lady Dedlock's body in the original of "The Morning" (Fig. 2) that Michael Steig argues she may be perceived as a "thing" (155). The dark plate narrator not only literally and figuratively shapes characters for the visual narrative but also dictates what details audiences are to perceive.⁸

Traditionally, objectivity suggests an offering of comprehensive knowledge and insight, but this is not the case in *Bleak House*. At every level—within this fictional world, through the textual narration, and through the pictorial illustrations—objectivity functions on a principle of power, access to knowledge being the key to that power. At the core of each level, the search for truth is essential. As Graham Clarke argues, it is this search for "clarity and definity [sic]" that leads readers and characters out of the metaphorical Chancery fog, gives shape to the story, and clarifies truths (59)—revealing where the true Will is, the truth about Esther's and Lady Dedlock's identities, and who killed Mr. Tulkinghorn. While the novel is a detective story, the eyes that should see the truth are not always inclined to tell the truth. Mr. Tulkinghorn and even Mr. Bucket, the investigators of the narrative, possess the ability to see accurately, clearly, and completely, like cameras that record images of the external world without missing a detail (Thomas 137, 142-43). As indiscriminating observers, they represent the eyes of objectivity that penetrate the obscurities of subjectivity. Yet, although they seek answers to mysteries, they do not always facilitate awareness of truth for others but rather pick and choose the facts they wish to reveal and when to reveal them. Tulkinghorn sends Jo, the innocent and allegorical representative of truth and thus aptly nicknamed Terewth, away in order to bury Lady

⁷ See Johannsen (397-415) for images of duplicated plates.

⁸ Plunkett also explores the problem of restrictive objectivity by examining the paradox of intrinsic subjectivity in objective photography (226-28).

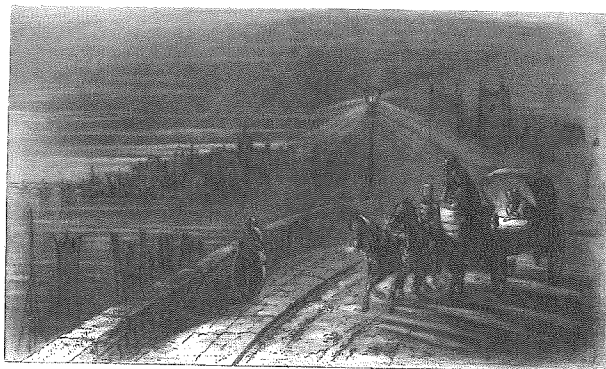


Fig. 8 "The Night"

Dedlock's past until a more opportune time should arise. In this case, Lady Dedlock sees Tulkinghorn as an inhuman force interested not in truth but information (Dickens 581). In fact, the use of the penetrative objective eye displayed by these characters as well as by the pictorial and textual narrators suggests that the power of seeing has little to do with unveiling truth. Instead, it has more to do with the acquisition and holding of secrets.

The abuse of knowledge seen in the OP illustrator's narrative is even mirrored in the objective textual (OT) account. The OT narrator presents the recurring symbol of shadows in various forms—as the false realities of portraits (255), foreshadowed or overshadowing doom and hopelessness (641, 890), the intangible force of law (504, 630), dilating infection (708), and the oppressive power of individuals and emotions (738, 855). Like the OP illustrator, the OT narrator avoids offering direct answers, just as he often resorts to satire to circuitously address social and political issues. By flooding readers with a clutter of significations, the textual narrator acts as a murky shadow and blocks perception. What this establishes is the propensity of objective narrators, textual and pictorial, to exercise power by withholding or obscuring knowledge rather than exposing truth.

Thus far, the foil structure of objective and subjective textual and pictorial narrations in *Bleak House* shows that self-identification in a world divided into opposing epistemologies and perspectives is impossible. However, one wishing to cultivate his or her "self" must be able to resolve the differences between these oppositions. In Esther, Dickens and Browne cross the limitations of objective and subjective existence and artistic dimensions to collaborate (perhaps inadvertently) on composing a character who determines and shapes her own identity. This begins paradoxically with the effacement of her externally-determined past, thus thrusting her into a period of objective insight. She begins her narrative with all the superficialities of a subjective narrator, speaking in the first-person of her past and tracing an autobiography that stems from her earliest memories to "full seven happy years" after the last recounted event (985). It is curious, then, when midway through the novel—like Mr. Gridley, Richard, and Lady Dedlock—Esther is literally and metaphorically overtaken with a blinding and identity-purging illness (558); the scarring of her face severs her maternal link and past identity, rendering her identity-less. She becomes an insubstantial and infectious shadow that, in her words, haunts her mother with the memories of her illicit past (586). Curiously enough, it is during this identity-less-ness

and blindness that Esther's subjective being takes on an objective persona. Like the OP narrator who often features landscapes or scenery as opposed to people, Esther's internal vision "retire[s] into a remote distance," detaching her from the familiarity of her own experiences and shrinking them, as she puts it, from the length of years to just a moment (555). She also sees her life as darker, referring to her vision as having "crossed a dark lake," like the OP narrator who inundates his images with shadow.

Interestingly, it is immediately after Esther experiences this bout of blindness and objective sight that the dark plates begin appearing in the serial publications. This may be because Esther finally understands the crushing weight of the external eye and the oppression of being watched as she fears revealing her mother's secret (583). However, it is also important to note that, inspired by subjective experience, the development of the OP narration conflates the realities of objectivity and subjectivity as well as of text and image.

Esther's bout of facelessness communicates a modern complex famously expressed by Emily Dickinson's declaration a half-century later, "I'm nobody! Who are you?"—the search for self-identification being integral to this novel's inception. *Bleak House* is a mix, as Alexander Welsh explains, between Dickens's earlier egocentric tales and his later social satires (4). Many of Dickens's novels, with their penchant for character-centric stories—*Oliver Twist* (1837-39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44), *David Copperfield* (1849-50)—explore and recreate identities and agency. However, *Bleak House* uses its subjective and objective combinations to bring the individual into a modern world and question what it means to have an absence of identity. The novel's original title, "Nobody's Fault," and the name of Esther's father, Nemo (Latin for No-one, No man), surround Esther with histories, or the lack thereof, that condemn her to literal and metaphorical orphanhood and illegitimacy. Still, rather than revel in her lack of identity like Dickinson, Esther challenges herself, readers, and creators to craft an identity that for her is aptly reified by her body.⁹ Her metaphorical facelessness (scarred face) compels her to strive for identity. To this point, she has been relegated to the role of observer; as Jane Smiley explains, as a governess, her "real job is to serve as a witness to the moral educations of others" (97). Likewise, her duty in the narrative is objectively to deliver, like a camera, the stories of multiple characters; she must ignore personal feeling in her observations, a responsibility she attempts to discharge more carefully in the early portions of her narrative.

Yet she is an object, an absence of identity, a lost face and a no-body as well. Like Dickens, whose celebrity status frames him as a public spectacle, and like Browne, whose status as Dickens's illustrator relegates him to the category of accessory, Esther's roles as governess and narrator mask the positive subjective identity she subconsciously struggles to unveil and validate through the course of the text. Her identity crisis speaks to a larger question of identity experienced by most people. Nemo and Esther are distinguished by their abilities to create life and narratives; by extension, the multilayered fusion of perspectives and mediums in *Bleak House* seek definitions of self based on authorial creativity. Dickens perceived himself as the father of his texts (Nayder 158); his writings

⁹ This is parsing words simply. Dickinson encourages self-identity that celebrates being a "nobody" or misfit beyond the prescribed bounds of society. Meanwhile, Dickens, Browne, and Esther show that being a "nobody" means struggling with a lack of identity imposed by restrictions of society. They are both driven by similar questions, though, of who "nobody" and "self" are.

legitimate him as creator as much as he legitimates them by claiming them as his own.¹⁰ He is, in essence, the ironic “Nobody,” the authorial progenitor and figurative Nemo, who has fathered all of Esther’s distresses at the same time that he, satirically reflecting on actuality, denies responsibility for the real-life corruption he incorporates in his fiction. Yet, as “Nobody,” this calls into question whether anybody, fictional and actual, has the agency to control his or her narrative.

The question of whether Dickens is nobody or somebody in control is relevant because he was not the sole creator of the novel but relied on Browne’s illustrations. Throughout his career, Dickens battled many challenges to his originality; after his death, George Cruikshank changed the way critics perceived Dickens’s relationship with other artists by positing the claim that he (Cruikshank) had in fact originated several characters and scenarios of *Oliver Twist* (1839) (Stein 168). Cruikshank shows that it is possible for an illustrator to have equal creative agency with the author. However, unlike Cruikshank, who only collaborated with Dickens on two works—*Sketches by Boz* (1836) and *Oliver Twist*—Browne illustrated ten of Dickens’s fifteen novels, and yet he has never enjoyed the largely undisputed status of creator credited the writer.¹¹ Never quite impressing contemporary artists, Browne’s reputation suffered a serious blow in the twentieth century when Q. D. Leavis accused him of lacking the creativity and effort that Dickens’s ninth novel, *Bleak House*, deserved (Steig 58; Leavis and Leavis 364). As Patten observes, “Most commentators think of Browne as a facile, sentimental, dutiful, accommodating, and unprofound adjunct to Dickens, of only slightly more importance than the compositors” (“Serial” 121). The point is that Browne faces the same quandary Esther and Dickens face. Much of his career unfolds under the pen name “Phiz,” an alias inspired by the word *physiognomy* and complimentary to Dickens’s own “Boz”; but Browne’s first alias was in fact “Nemo,” adopted on his first project with Dickens (Patten, “Publishing” 14). The name invites seeing the artist’s persona as a lack of self at the same time that it articulates a desire for identity. *Bleak House* is a vortex where these questions of identity collapse together and form a foil of objective and subjective textual and pictorial perspectives that ask: Am I nobody? Do I shape my world and my identity? Am I a creator? Is the ultimate creator objective or subjective, textual or imagistic, or all of the above? *Bleak House* answers these questions with its unique narrative structure.

Dickens, Browne, and Esther each tell a story of association, creating webs of connection in order to establish themselves as creators—an analogy significant for clarifying the relationship between their narrative styles. As Dickens’s detective story draws massive webs of coincidence between characters and plots, Browne depicts webs of association drawn by the portals etched in and about images, while Esther’s life narrative supplies the connecting thread for both. In “The Art of Fiction” (1888), Henry James claims that writing fiction requires experience:

Experience is never limited, and it is never complete, it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind . . . (64)

¹⁰ Dickens, demanding and exacting toward his artists, regarded them as subordinates; see Stein (169) and Dickens’s letter to Forster (qtd. in Stein 171).

¹¹ By focusing on Phiz’s dark plate contributions, Harvey argues that Browne and Dickens are equal collaborators (3); he is one of very few to do so.

Like the infinite bounds of reality, experience is potentially limitless. Yet fiction, like the gap-filled spider-web, can only ever be an incomplete record of the external world and thus must make a network of memories to construct a coherent consciousness. Dickens and Browne do this through Esther’s narrative retrospection. Through her struggles with perspective and self-awareness, each exposes how the epistemologies of objectivity and subjectivity are inextricable when conceiving human identity.

Thus is Esther created through her autobiography. Early explorations into the psyche revolved around associationism. Galvanized by John Locke’s empiricism in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)¹² and G.W.F. Hegel’s inquiries into the subjective consciousness in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Victorians regarded the linking of imperfectly remembered experiences necessary to constructing identity. This concept has advanced to modern consciousness theories articulated in works like Antonio Damasio’s *The Feeling of What Happens* (1999) and Daniel Dennet’s *Consciousness Explained* (1991); self-awareness is built through the interconnections, or webs, of autobiographical memory (Lodge 15). In *Bleak House*, such flawed recollections form the crux of the plot. It is because of the loss of memory or artifacts that events are driven forward (to discover the lost Will or Esther’s and Lady Dedlock’s pasts). Esther’s memory, then, is what allows her insight into an otherwise foggy world and its mess of obscure relationships.

Through the main conceit of shadow, she draws connections to understand how dark, shifty, inhuman, and dehumanizing forces—like the Chancery Court and law—infest and oppress characters like Mr. Gridley, Miss Flite, and Richard, leaving them drained of life and identity. Steig categorizes shadows among many other emblems (Chancery fog, law, disease) in *Bleak House* as unstoppable “external, nonhuman or dehumanized forces” (149). However, shadow actually encompasses these other motifs and symbols; it signifies the falsity and obscuration of fog, the intangibility of law, and infectiousness of disease. Thus, Mr. Gridley and Miss Flite are drained by the institution they obsess over, an understanding to which Esther brings more significance when she realizes the similarities shared by the three: “But, to me, the shadow of that pair [Miss Flite and Mr. Gridley], one living and one dead, fell heavier on Richard’s departure than the darkness of the darkest night” (405-06). Gridley’s death foreshadows Richard’s own at the same time that it overshadows Richard’s and Ada’s lives; for, like Gridley, Richard is drained by the law. Haunted by the “long thin shadow” of intangible law embodied in Mr. Vholes (695), Richard struggles against a force that lacks palpability, he spends his strength, and he wastes his youthful vigor. Lady Dedlock’s death permanently darkens her face, signifying a loss of self in Browne’s “Shadow” and Dickens’s fifty-ninth chapter (976); similarly, Richard visibly loses his personhood when the color in his face fades. Altogether, the shadow that overcomes Richard saps him of his identity, leaving him an infectious shadow, suffering from fever and delusions, and threatening to infect Ada with “poverty and troubles” (979). What Esther’s association realizes here is the danger of institutional and naturalistic powers that menace human bodies, including hers.

As Esther comes to understand her identity and finds her own happy ending through Dickens’s text, Browne’s illustrations likewise appropriate the method of developing

¹² Locke’s discussion of the difference between intuitive and demonstrative knowledge provides a relevant context for this discussion of objectivity and subjectivity (308-29).



Fig. 9 "The little old Lady"

idea is that these images communicate in the past tense, opposing the verbal tense of the OT and OP narrators who communicate in a present tense that exhibit the "always" extant state of the fictive reality in *Bleak House*. Thus the subjective illustrations act as memory recalling motifs to create a chain of images that discover Esther's identity in the same way that she discovers herself in the text; that is, by owning her new face. The etchings

consciousness to construct Esther's identity. Through association, the images access abstract themes and connect Esther and Lady Dedlock in extra-textual narratives that redefine who they and the creators are, sometimes encountering incomplete and contradictory information between the subjective pictorial (SP) and textual (ST) narratives, but still using that information to create meaningful internal realities rather than a meaningless external reality.

Like Esther narrating from recollection, the SP narration etches illustrations that appear like individual memories. Thus, the subjective illustrations, or lithographic etchings, have frayed edges, like a time and weather-damaged photograph or a faulty memory recalled by an internal eye.¹³ The

suggest Esther and Lady Dedlock's kinship by comparing their physical similarity. The first pictures showing the two—"The little old Lady" (Fig. 9) and "Consecrated ground" (Fig. 10)—connect them: both wear dark, long cloaks extending from neck to mid-calf which hide their bodies, and both don large bonnets which frame their faces, blocking them completely from view, making them faceless. This visual union introduces an extra-textual symbolic narrative, a meaningful redefinition of episodes, and thus recaptures the identities of Esther and her creators.

The interchangeableness of Esther's body with Lady Dedlock's suggests interchangeable beginnings and endings that rise above the textual plot. In "The



Fig. 10 "Consecrated ground"

little old Lady" (Fig. 9), where Esther first appears, the protagonist stands in front of the Chancery Court, accompanied by people who have been or will be victimized by the court system and enshrouded in the dark fog emanating from its interior. This illustration articulates the driving conflict of the novel—a battle of wills between inhuman forces

¹³ On the Victorian idea that memory acts as a degraded version of the camera see Lee (74-80) and Thomas (141).

(fog, darkness, and law) and frail subjects that are seeking answers to their life questions. Meanwhile, "Consecrated ground" (Fig. 10), where Lady Dedlock first appears, shows where the novel ends—a graveyard where she, overwhelmed by the threatening figures and forces of objectivity (Mr. Tulkinghorn, Mr. Bucket, shadows, and cold), comes to die. It is also where the final mystery (the location of Lady Dedlock) comes to an end. Thus, with the faceless and similar bodies of Esther and Lady Dedlock lending themselves to exchange, the scenes their bodies occupy become united, eliminating the linear confines of textual narration and extending the purview of subjectivity. Here, the identities of Esther and Lady Dedlock at the beginning and end become one as Esther, presumably born dead, and Lady Dedlock, having buried her past, can only rectify their situations by inverting roles—Lady Dedlock must die so that Esther may overcome her past. The potential for infinite interpretations due to this interchangeableness means the creators, Dickens and Browne, have succeeded in generating a story that simulates actual life, complete with people who seek to define themselves and who struggle against demeaning environments and institutions. Yet their lives can be told from myriad angles and therefore stand a chance of overcoming objective forces by exerting subjective agency and creating—textually, pictorially, or autobiographically—their own fictive world. As Jordan makes plain, while the massiveness of *Bleak House* exercises Esther's, Dickens's, and Browne's artistic creativity, the three do not act as "controlling consciousness[es]" of the narrative (27). Rather, by crossing narratives, they multiply the possibilities of interpretation and thus invite readers to create their own sense of the *Bleak House* world and imagined sense of self.

Resolving More Divisions

In the end, when the four pictorial and textual narrators interact, they demand an exploration of reader-creator, illustration-text, and illustrator-author relationships. They question and redefine boundaries and thus find a balance between traditional narrative authority and advancing methods of perception, ultimately creating a holistic understanding of *Bleak House* and anticipating an incipient aesthetic that relies on a synthesis of narrative techniques and modes of thought. Yet, just as Esther struggles against the blinding and overwhelming shadowy forces of objective reality to assert subjective agency, and just as Dickens's and Browne's endeavors lead them to identities as creators, *Bleak House* confronts the tensions brought about by new technologies and methods implemented in the art world to create a collaborative masterpiece.

Browne's artistic standing is much less pronounced and lauded than Dickens's, due both to harsh criticism and to the diminishing status or reputation of art. Dickens challenged traditional publication standards by popularizing the serial novel, bringing together capitalism, art, and new technology (Clayton 199-211; Lodge 117-18). Serial publishing facilitated opportunities for writers, publishers, investors, audiences, and artists; extended narratives required ponderous explorations of character relationships, meticulous plot developments, and further possibilities for dialogue. Cheaper prices made the title more accessible and, as readers became increasingly invested, publishers and artists gained larger and quicker monetary returns, and retail sales rose as shop-window copies attracted customers (Patten 14-15). Overall, fiction became a household item, book owning became possible for middle and upper-middle classes, and Dickens became a celebrity in the process (19).

But illustrations were central to this new style of literary publication; for Dickens, they served an essential role, since many of his books were read aloud to semi-literate audiences, making illustrations integral to the marketing process (Andrews 246; Plunkett 236). Images also maintained continuity for long projects that sometimes took a year or more to complete; *Bleak House* took twenty months, according to Lutman (220).¹⁴ Finally, for the first half of the nineteenth century, illustrations were so respected that every artistic discipline including music strove to have the same effects as the visual arts (Maxwell xxii). However, Browne's illustrations were particularly essential to Dickens's success as they gave characters tangible and recognizable faces. When shopkeepers put advertisements in windows for Dickens's publications, they featured Phiz's illustrations; when theater performers, actors, and clowns impersonated Dickens's characters, they could trust an audience to recognize them by their costumes alone (Patten, "Publishing" 31-32).

Yet by the end of the Victorian period, the narrative value of illustrations had declined. Techniques, such as those used by John Everett Millais, were deemed "decorative" and "ornamental," relegating the image to a superficial role (Fisher 60; Kooistra 9). Consequently, while the graphic arts have a considerable presence in twenty-first-century media, images in nineteenth-century illustrated narratives are often forgotten. This is evident in free versions on Project Gutenberg and Amazon Kindle where texts lack the images that complete the narrative.

Still, it is important to recognize that Dickens's and Browne's *Bleak House* is a story that resolves the literary tensions of power and technology by synthesizing literary mediums (text and illustration) and modes of thought (objective and subjective perspectives), thus elevating the significance of illustrations and the role of illustrator equal to that of text and writer. Some scholars differentiate between Dickens's and Browne's purpose; amidst an otherwise compelling and intricate argument, Patten posits that, while Dickens explores

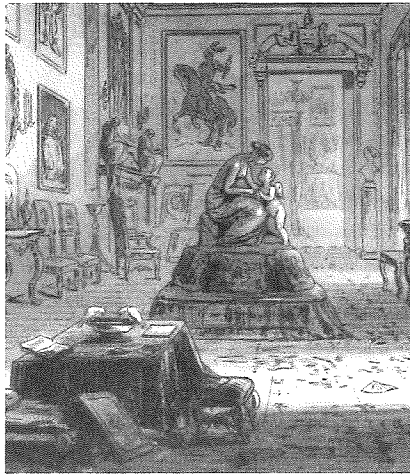


Fig. 11

"Sunset in the long Drawing-room at Chesney Wold"

¹⁴ On readers of serialized novels, see Graham Clarke (66-67).

the struggles and "Experience" of humanity, Browne "invents a way of supplying the 'observation' that the observant characters . . . nonetheless do not achieve" ("Serial" 97). Dickens and Browne provide these perspectives in the subjective and objective portions of their narratives; their value is neither hierarchical nor mutually exclusive but rather a complete diegeses of their own which, despite their comprehensiveness, unite to create an even greater sense of interpretive possibilities.

While Dickens was the director of the project, the two collaborated as artists; indeed, Browne had more artistic license than is sometimes realized. His etching, "Sunset in the long Drawing-room at Chesney Wold" (Fig. 11), for instance, replaces Dickens's tree described in the text with an overshadowing statue of a mother and child, a move that dramatically influences the direction of interpretation as the forces oppressing Lady Dedlock seem to be no longer plainly naturalistic but rather socially constructed. Clearly, Browne's illustrations did more than simply highlight, clarify, and amplify Dickens's text: they also articulated Browne's own narrative. Ultimately, even though the text may seem to be the traditional authority in literature, *Bleak House* shows how such delineation of powers can be erased and the two combined in a partnership to produce a work that is greater than either individually—text or illustration—on its own could provide.¹⁵

University of Louisiana at Lafayette

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¹⁵ Images used in this article are courtesy of Louisiana and Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, New Orleans. *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1853.

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AFFECTIVE ECONOMIES AND CHARLES DICKENS'S
THE HAUNTED MAN

BY MARIA BACHMAN

Men cannot live isolated: we are *all* bound together, for mutual good, or for mutual misery, as living nerves in the same body.—Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843)

In the 1840s, Charles Dickens's Christmas Books—the first of which was the widely popular *A Christmas Carol*—were not only "keenly-anticipated annual productions" for readers but also "guaranteed money-spinners" for the author (Slater 261). Each of these illustrated volumes, handsomely and seasonally bound in red cloth with gilt edges, served a dual purpose: as holiday gifts for Dickens's devoted readers and as a profitable commodity for him.¹ When Dickens realized that he would need to postpone the Christmas Book promised to publishers Bradbury and Evans in 1847, he lamented the inevitable loss of income such a delay would bring: "I am very loath to lose the money," he wrote to his good friend and future biographer John Forster (*Letters* 5:165).² Dickens especially lamented jeopardizing the intimate relationship he had established with his "Dear Friends."³ He was reluctant, he said, to "leave any gap at Christmas firesides that I ought to fill" (emphasis added).⁴ Perhaps not so coincidentally, it is the specter of loss and obligation that haunts the last of Dickens's series of Christmas Books, *The Haunted Man*.⁵ Subtitled "The Ghost's Bargain," the tale offers a profound meditation on the emotional economics of gift-giving and fellow feeling.⁶

Over a year later, Dickens wrote to Angela Burdett-Coutts that he had "hit upon a little notion for the book, which I hope is a pretty one, with a good Christmas tendency" (*Letters* 5:435). Dickens's "notion" for the story was that "bad and good are inextricably linked in remembrance, and that you could not choose the enjoyment of recollecting only the good" (443). For Dickens, memory is an emotional economy that employs a calculation of debits and credits; within the economy of *The Haunted Man*, affective gains and losses are experienced through social exchange rather than commodity exchange.⁷ The tale concerns the well-known yet reclusive chemist Redlaw who is tormented by "old echoes in his mind" of past wrongs and sorrows (Dickens 325). His mother's

¹ The first edition of *The Haunted Man* "was bound in a volume of one hundred and eighty-eight pages, in the old foolscap octavo form, and at the old price of five shillings" (Dickens, *Christmas Books* xxviii). The frontispiece and title page were illustrated by John Tenniel and the volume contained fourteen additional illustrations by Clarkson Stanfield, R.A.; John Leech; Frank Stone, A.E.A.; and John Tenniel.

² On Dickens's concerns about his financial well-being, see Akroyd (411, 416, 573).

³ It was Dickens's purpose to serve as his reader's "guide, philosopher, and friend" (qtd. Slater 171).

⁴ Juliet John notes, "the acceptance of a financial connection between [Dickens] and his audience coexisted with the need for an emotional connection" (156).

⁵ Though Dickens termed his fifth and final Christmas Book "a wonderful success" (see *Letters* 5: 466-67 and 5:459), *The Haunted Man* did not sell well; 18,000 copies were sold at a net profit of 793 pounds, 6000 less than the previous Christmas Book, *The Battle of Life*, generally considered his least popular work.

⁶ The scant critical attention accorded *The Haunted Man* tends to focus on either the autobiographical inspiration for the tale or the moral power of memory.

⁷ Most if not all "social interaction forms an emotional economy, the net inner gains and losses we experience with a given person, or in a given conversation, or on any given day" (Goleman 14).

neglect of him as a child, his bitter disappointments in love, and the death of his devoted sister are among those painful memories that so burden him in “the lengthening sum of recollection” (341). When his spectral double appears unbidden and offers him the “gift” of forgetfulness, Redlaw unwittingly trades his soul—indeed, his very humanity—in the “bargain.” Drawing provocatively on the Faust myth, Dickens shows that there is no profit for Redlaw in this transaction, only further loss.

In “The Natural History of German Life” (1856), George Eliot argued, “the greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies” (263-64). She lamented, however, that the period’s “one great novelist”—Charles Dickens—chose to limit his artistic “gift” to the depiction of the “external traits” of individuals rather than “their psychological character—their conceptions of life, and their emotions.” Certainly, Eliot has long been taken to task by scholars who have argued widely and persuasively that the complexity of human emotions and relations was at the very heart of Dickens’s fiction.⁸ What this analysis adds to the ongoing discussion is that Dickens sharply intuited what “brain science” is just beginning to understand—the interdependency of memory and emotion. In exchange for the destruction of all his “sorrow, wrong, & trouble” (“The Gift Bestowed”), Redlaw agrees to give up “the intertwined chain of feelings and associations, [which are] each in its turn dependent on, and nourished by, the banished recollections” (Dickens 343). He does not yet understand, however, that “those pictures” are the “golden links . . . that should bind us [all] in a radiant garland” (341). In other words, as his memory is erased, so too is his ability to feel for others.

In the immediate aftermath of the transaction, Redlaw encounters a young street urchin, a beastlike, “baby savage”: “The time had been, and not many minutes since, when such a sight as this would have—wrung the Chemist’s heart. He looked upon it now, coldly; but, with a heavy effort to—remember something—he did not know what—” (Dickens 345). Paradoxically, where a gift should create a “feeling bond,” the gift that Redlaw accepts has the opposite effect—it impoverishes him and everyone around him:

Whither he went, he neither knew nor cared, so that he avoided company. The change he felt within him made the busy streets a desert, and himself a desert, and the multitude around him, in their manifold endurances and ways of life, a mighty waste of sand, which the winds tossed into unintelligible heaps and made a ruinous confusion of. (370)

Beyond his retrograde amnesia, what Redlaw also inadvertently “gains” from the gift is the power to destroy the memories and bonds of sympathy in all those with whom he comes into contact. As the Specter explains, the gift involves an element of reciprocity:

The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will. Without recovering yourself the power that you have yielded up, you shall henceforth destroy its like in all whom you approach. Your wisdom has discovered that the memory of sorrow, wrong and trouble is the lot of all mankind, and that mankind would be the happier, in its other memories, without it . . . Go! Be its benefactor! (344)

⁸ It is in Dickens’s short fiction that “his penetration of the human psyche far surpasses anything in his longer work” (Thomas 14).

Dickens understood keenly that social relations are built around the process of giving and receiving, and then giving back again. In *The Haunted Man*, Dickens offers a fictive paradigm for what sociologist Marcel Mauss would later present as his theory of the gift economy. One of the central concepts in Mauss’s theory is the nature and reach of reciprocity. In Mauss’s formulation, the gift is the expression of a social relationship—the expression of a human bond—and parties of a gift relationship are “under the obligation to repay the gift received” (10-11). Like a financial bond, the gift entails a contractual obligation (albeit unspoken and unspecified) between the giver and receiver such that the receiver must give something back, whether material or immaterial. Thus, the gift of forgetting for Redlaw is contingent upon his obligation to extend such a “gift” to the people around him—his beneficiaries, in a matter of speaking.

Though Dickens regarded his books as a good—a commodity—he knew that ultimately these gifts had an emotional value over and above their commercial value. Moreover, he regarded the relationship between writer and reader as a form of social interaction, and such interactions necessarily involved a high level of emotional exchange. This was evidenced first and foremost in the ways he worked to establish an intimate relationship with his readers, a relationship he described as “*personally affectionate*, and like no other man’s . . . to *commune* with my readers ‘in any form a labour of love’” (qtd. Slater 171; emphasis added).⁹ When Dickens presented his readers with the gift of a story, he felt he was giving them part of himself; this notion of gift-giving lends credence to Mauss’s claim that “one gives away what is in reality a part of one’s nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone’s spiritual essence” (10). In fact, while completing *The Haunted Man*, Dickens “confessed” he had been “affected uncommonly in the working out” of the story (*Letters* 5:457). He wrote to his publisher William Bradbury that he was “crying [his] eyes out over it—not painfully but pleasantly as he hope[d] the readers [would]” (5:451).¹⁰ Dickens was not just tugging at heartstrings; what he wanted for readers was what he wanted for himself—to be *moved*.¹¹ William Thackeray reported that his mother, Mrs. Carmichael Smith, read *The Haunted Man* and was “very much moved” by the story; she claimed, “there’s something in it will affect you personally” (Thackeray 2:469).

Indeed, in a prescient echo of Mauss’s theory that gifts are inalienable—they are “to some extent parts of persons” (11)—the Specter informs Redlaw, “[t]he gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will.” That gift, moreover, will have a continuing claim on Redlaw: its “diffusion is inseparable and inalienable” (Dickens 344). When the Specter admonishes, “Be happy in the *good* you have won, and in the *good* that you do!” (emphasis added), he asserts the link, or shall we say *bond*, between the person and gift, thus delineating the distinction between commodity relations and gift relations. In a gift economy, people and goods are inalienably linked; in commodity relations, a

⁹ *North American Review* declared Dickens’s “genius” was his “fellow feeling with his race” (qtd. Collins 246).

¹⁰ Ruth Glancy reports that the MS. of chapter three is heavily blotted with tears (Slater 648n12). See also *Letters* 5:466-67).

¹¹ As Dickens remarked of “The Tale of Richard Doubledick” to W. W. F. de Cerjat, “I hope you will find, in the story of the Soldier . . . something that may *move you a little*. It moved me not a little in the writing, and I believe has touched a vast number of people” (*Letters* 7:495; emphasis added).

transaction dissolves the obligations that link the parties; the commodity bought is thus alienated from the seller. Dickens keenly grasped the *interdependency* that inhered in gift relations. Indeed, according to Mauss, in a gift exchange, “the objects are never completely separated from the men who exchange them; the communion and alliance they establish are well-nigh indissoluble” (31).

What perversity of interdependence—of “communion and alliance”—however, *this* gift entails! When Redlaw merely stands next to Mrs. Tetterby on the street one morning while she is out shopping and briefly exchanges a look with her, she unsuspectingly “catches” his blighted and wretched condition. In the midst of calculating what she could afford to buy at the market for her holiday dinner, she is suddenly overcome with resentment towards “people who have got money” and filled with regret that she “mightn’t have done better and been happier” if she had married a richer man (Dickens 358). Later, she recounts how she must have been either “ill or mad” because she “couldn’t call up anything that seemed to bind” her to her once beloved husband nor could she remember any of “the pleasures and enjoyments [they] had ever had” (359). Redlaw’s own curse of forgetting not only transmits an amnesiac state to all with whom he comes in contact, but his indifference towards and detachment from his fellow humans is similarly *transmitted*. That is, Redlaw’s “selfishness” and “ingratitude” become “effects of circulation” as he transforms everyone he comes in contact with into bitter and unfeeling wretches. In a letter to Forster, Dickens explained his “intention”: that Redlaw “should not know himself how he communicates the gift, whether by look or touch; and that it should diffuse itself in its own way in each case. It is not only necessary to be so . . . but I think it makes the thing wilder and stranger” (*Letters* 5:443).

A gift economy, according to Mauss, is not only a system that promotes the circulation of goods (as in a market economy) but also a system that promotes the circulation of “selves.” Mauss’s idea about the circulation of selves resonates particularly with recent theories in social neuroscience about the brain’s system for “emotional contagion” and the “transmission of affect.”¹² Psychologists Elaine Hatfield, John Cacioppo, and Richard Rapson define emotional contagion as the propensity to unconsciously and spontaneously imitate the emotional expressions of others and experience similar emotions.¹³ More broadly, psychologist Gerald Schoenwilde describes this phenomenon as a “process in which a person or group influences the emotions of behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes (50). In most cases of emotional contagion, the transfer of emotion is “relatively automatic, unintentional, uncontrollable, and largely inaccessible to conversant awareness” (Hatfield et. al. 4). Indeed, contagion happens so quickly that individuals are rarely conscious of the process as it happens to them.

While the terms “emotional contagion” and “transmission of affect” were obviously not available to Dickens when he was writing *The Haunted Man* in 1848,¹⁴ the tale’s

¹² See Hatfield et. al. and Brennan.

¹³ Emotional contagion may also be understood as an “emotional convergence” between two or more individuals, “the tendency to *automatically* mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person, and, consequently, to converge emotionally” (Hatfield et. al. 5).

¹⁴ While Greta Perletti explores the ways in which *The Haunted Man*’s preoccupation with memory reflects mid-Victorian discourses in the mental sciences, critics have paid scant attention to the tale’s insights into

focus on the mind’s capacity for imitation and synchrony resonates powerfully with the “Carpenter Effect.” In the 1850s, physiologist William Benjamin Carpenter introduced a neurological theory known as the “ideo-motor principle,” a form of imitation whereby actions are triggered by ideas. That is, we may not be aware of it, but suggestions can be made to the mind by others or by observations. Those suggestions can influence the mind and affect motor behavior. Carpenter also noticed that emotional reactions could occur outside of consciousness until attention is drawn to them.

Our feelings towards persons and objects may undergo most important changes, without our being in the least degree aware, until we have our attention directed to our own mental state, of the alteration which has taken place in them . . . the Emotional state seems often to be determined by circumstances of which the individual has no Ideational consciousness, and especially by the emotional states of those by whom he is surrounded. (539-41)

Interestingly, it was Carpenter’s attempt to offer a scientific explanation for mesmerism (and other parapsychological phenomenon) in 1852 that resulted in the ideo-motor theory (see 147-53). Attempting to provide a scientific explanation for a number of popular parapsychological phenomena (including table-turning, mesmerism, the divining rod, and the Ouija board), Carpenter posited that muscular movement could be independent of volition or emotions. “Ideo-motor action,” in other words, described how ideas become the source of involuntary (or reflex) motor movements. Dickens, of course, was not unfamiliar with contemporary discoveries and theories in the mental sciences; he advocated what he believed to be the positive therapeutic effects of mesmeric practices, and he became a skilled practitioner himself.¹⁵ Although mesmerism was eventually dismissed as a pseudoscience—Carpenter himself was one of the most prominent and influential opponents¹⁶—Fred Kaplan points out that mesmerism provided Dickens “with a rationale for the working of personality and mind . . . [and] with a language and an imagery that could be dramatically utilized in fictional creation” (112-13). While the ideo-motor principle had yet to be articulated, Dickens seems to be testing out his own theory of mental physiology in *The Haunted Man*: just as the transfer of energy between the mesmerist and the mesmerized suggests a neural connection, so too may such a neural connection exist between individuals when there is the non-conscious transfer of emotion.

Perhaps Dickens *was* a neuroscientist—at least in terms of anticipating significant twenty-first century scientific discoveries about the mind. Dickens’s pioneering fictive hypothesis for how people “catch” the emotions of others has only recently—very recently, in fact—been scientifically proven with discovery of “mirror neurons” and the concept of neural WiFi. That is, humans are wired to connect: our brains are constantly monitoring and reacting to our environments and the people with whom we come into contact. Mirror neurons are a mechanism in the brain that enable us to “tune in” to another person’s behavior or affect. They are triggered from an action, observation, or unconscious perception of someone that then automatically produces imitative or

Dickens’s engagement with other emerging theories in Victorian psychology.

¹⁵ See Kaplan, Winter, and Henson. Dickens was involved in mesmerism while traveling in Italy (1840s).

¹⁶ In *Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Etc.: Historically and Scientifically Considered* (1877), Carpenter debunked mesmerism by providing scientific explanations for the various phenomena with which it was associated.

synchronic behaviors.¹⁷ As psychologist Daniel Goleman explains, “contagion spreads via multiple neural circuits operating in parallel within each person’s brain. These systems for emotional contagion traffic in the entire range of feeling, from sadness and anxiety to joy” (Goleman 39). According to neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni, the “interdependence between self and other that mirror neurons allow shapes the social interactions between people” (265).¹⁸ Moreover, mirror neurons “make emotions contagious, letting the feelings we witness flow through us . . . we ‘feel’ the other in the broadest sense of the word: sensing their sentiments, their movements, their sensations, their emotions as they act inside us” (Goleman 42). Mirror neurons, we now know, are responsible for an awareness of and fellow feeling between individuals.

Even before Redlaw’s fatal bargain with the Phantom (before he manifests symptoms of “infection”), he is introduced to the reader as a “haunted man”—“taciturn, thoughtful, gloomy, shadowed by habitual reserve, retiring always and jocund never” (Dickens 325). Moreover, there is a palpable emotional residue that unsettles the visitors to his “solitary and vault-like dwelling” (326). At the beginning of the tale, Mr. William Swidger and his wife, Milly, bring dinner to the reticent and morose Chemist one Christmas eve. During the course of their visit, “Mrs. William” tells Redlaw about one of his students—“a sick young gentleman” who is “too ill to go home this holiday-time, and lives, unknown to anyone, in but a common kind of lodging” (336). The Swidgers note that the room “began to darken strangely . . . there was a very heavy gloom and shadow gathering behind the Chemist’s chair”; the disconcerted Phillip Swidger (William’s octogenarian father) remarks, “there’s a chill and dismal feeling in the room” (335; 337). After the three Swidgers take their leave, the room is enveloped in almost complete darkness and the verdant and lush holly branch that the elder Swidger had brought for Redlaw “withered on the wall, and dropped—dead branches” (338).

In her exploration of the affective connections between and among individuals and their environments, Teresa Brennan has suggested provocatively that affects are always material and composed of an energetic dimension: “we are not self-contained in terms of our energies” (6). According to Brennan, when we enter a room and unmistakably “feel the atmosphere” (of fear, for example), our biochemistry and neurology, if only for an instant, is altered. This is known as the transmission of affect.¹⁹ When Redlaw arrives at the Tetterby’s to inquire about a student lodger, Mrs. Tetterby is immediately gripped with fear by his presence. Mr. Tetterby, who is described as *not* being “altogether free from the infection” of his wife’s fear, cautiously addresses the pale stranger. In doing so, he suddenly becomes aware “of some change in the atmosphere”; in that instant, Redlaw “transfers to him the look of dread he had directed towards the wife” (Dickens 360). As

¹⁷ Carpenter’s ideo-motor principle, a theory of how the neurological unconscious might work, was remarkably prescient of what cognitive scientists have only recently defined as an embodied simulation of a motor experience. When a person perceives an action, an emotion, or a sensation experienced by someone else, internal representations of the body states associated with those actions, emotions, and sensations are automatically transmitted to the observer “as if” he or she were performing similar actions or experiencing similar emotions or sensations. See Vittorio Gallese, “Embodied Simulation: from Neurons to Phenomenal Experience.” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 4 (2005): 23-48.

¹⁸ Iacoboni explains, “the role of mirror neurons in language is to transform our bodily actions from a private experience to a social experience to be shared with our fellow humans through language” (95).

¹⁹ Contagion is a “simple affective transfer” than can be discerned just as easily in crowds as in enclosed rooms (Brennan 49). The idea of transmitted affects thus “undermines the dichotomy between the individual and the environment and the related opposition between the biological and the social” (7).

Mr. Tetterby directs the Chemist to the lodger’s room, the men briefly exchange looks: “The watchfulness of his haggard look, and the inexplicable distrust that darkened it, seemed to trouble Mr. Tetterby. He paused; and looking fixedly at him in return, stood for a minute or so, like a man stupefied, or fascinated” (361). Following this silent exchange, a terrible pall is cast over the once-genial Tetterby family. Mr. Tetterby bellows at his terrified children to go to bed and then dejectedly retreats to the chimney-corner where he sits sullen and brooding, while Mrs. Tetterby looks “contemptuously around the room” neither exchanging a word with the other. Moreover, within a few hours even “the tempers of the little Tetterbys had sadly changed”:

Usually they were an unselfish good-natured, yielding little race, sharing short-commons when it happened (which was pretty often) contentedly and even generously . . . [b]ut they were fighting now, not only for the soap and water, but even for the breakfast which was yet in perspective. The hand of every little Tetterby was against the other little Tetterbys . . . (390)

Not only has the Tetterby family become discontented with and querulous among themselves, but their “angry passions” (Dickens 393) are also directed outward. As he reads about “melancholy case[s] of destitution” in the newspaper, Mr. Tetterby callously remarks, “What do I care what other people do, or are done to? . . . No business of mine” (392).²⁰ Redlaw exerts a kind of unintentional mesmeric influence over almost everyone with whom he comes in contact. As Benefactor, he transfers his “fatal gift”—emotional oblivion—to those “who never sought it; who unknowingly received a curse of which they had no warning and which they had no power to shun” (386). Although Redlaw is emotionally bereft, he is not insensible to the “effect of his charmed influence stealing over those with whom he came into contact” (372):

I am infected! I am infectious! I’m charged with poison for my own mind, and the minds of mankind. Where I felt interest, compassion, and sympathy, I am turning to stone. Selfishness and ingratitude spring up in my blighting footsteps. I am only so much less base than the wretches whom I make so, that in the moment of their transformation I can hate them. (370)

In addition to the “evil tempers” that the Tetterby family gives way to, perhaps the most dramatic transfer of Redlaw’s “fatal gift”—his emotional detachment—involves his interactions with the Swidger family, custodians at the university to whom we are introduced at the beginning of the tale. The family’s benevolent patriarch, Philip Swidger, boasts of his remarkable ability to perfectly recall long-departed family and friends in their once “alive and healthy state” (381). The perpetually “merry and happy” octogenarian however, is reduced to complete senility at Redlaw’s touch, since his memories, however bittersweet, are what have sustained him and enabled him to find meaning in his life. His two sons, also recipients of Redlaw’s gift, dispassionately observe their father’s “driveling, pitiable manner” with “cold, uninterested eye[s]” and “determined apathy.”

Just as such negative emotions as anger, regret, and indifference may spread through an affective atmosphere (a room, a street corner, a crowd), so too can positive emotions

²⁰ “Melancholy case of destitution. Yesterday a small man, with a baby in his arms, and surrounded by half-a-dozen ragged little ones, of various ages between ten and two, the whole of whom were evidently in a famishing condition, appeared before the worthy magistrate” (Dickens 393).

(love, joy, contentment, gratitude) be unintentionally transferred from one individual to another. Such affects are, in fact, powerful contaminants. Dickens agrees with Adam Smith that some emotions are stronger than others and thus have greater "currency": "our propensity to sympathize with joy is much stronger than our propensity to sympathize with sorrow" (Smith 62).²¹ Indeed, Dickens understood what modern psychologists have described as "the undoing effect"—the process whereby positive emotions can exert countervailing psycho-physiological effects on the afflicted individual and thereby restore fellow feeling.

Though Redlaw fears that he may destroy "what is tenderest and best within her bosom," Milly Swidger's "steady quality of goodness" is completely impervious throughout the story to his "charmed influence" (Dickens 366, 372). In Part III, "The Gift Reversed," it is Milly's "strength of character" (329)—her infectious positivity—that not only quells but reverses the ill *affects* of Redlaw's gifts. As Dickens explained to Frank Stone, one of the illustrators for his Christmas book, Milly is "the very spirit of morning, gladness, innocence, hope, love, domesticity, etc. etc. etc." (*Letters* 5:448).²² Following the "unwholesome blight" that Redlaw's visit leaves on the Tetterby's, Milly arrives on the scene to bring about "the restoration of domestic tranquillity" (Dickens 399). As Milly approaches the Tetterby home on Christmas Day, the contentiousness of the family is suddenly suspended as young Johnny Tetterby declares,

"Here! Mother! Father!" cried Johnny, running into the room. "Here's Mrs. William coming down the street" . . . Mr. Tetterby's face began to smooth and brighten; Mrs. Tetterby's began to smooth and brighten. "Why, Lord forgive me . . . what evil tempers have I been giving way to? What has been the matter here?" (394)

The power of such positive emotions cause an amplified ripple effect:

"Hurrah! Here's Mrs. William!" cried Johnny.

So she was, and all the children with her; and as she came in, they kissed her, and kissed one another, and kissed the baby, and kissed their mother and father, and then ran back and flocked and danced about her trooping on with her in triumph. Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby were not a bit behind-hand in the warmth of their reception. . . . She came among them like the spirit of all goodness, affection, gentle consideration, love, and domesticity. (396)

Indeed, following Dickens's explicit instructions to Stone, Milly's "peace and goodness" (385) were to be emphasized particularly in book's final illustration, "Milly and the Children" (Fig. 1).²³

Milly's love and compassion, in effect, serves as a conduit for restoring affection, gratitude, and memories in all those to whom Redlaw has transferred his fatal gift. Not only is the student who had been infected by Redlaw "restored" when he hears the Tetterby

²¹ Smith continues, "our fellow-feeling for the agreeable emotion approaches much more nearly to the vivacity of what is naturally felt by the persons principally concerned, than that which we conceive for the painful one" (62).

²² Dickens praised Frank Stone for his ability to "pictorially, make the little woman [Milly] I love" (*Letters* 5:446).

²³ "I know how pretty she will be with the children in your hands," Dickens wrote to Stone, "and [I] should be a stupendous jackass if I had any distrust of it" (*Letters* 5:448).

children joyfully crying out Milly's name, but Redlaw himself undergoes a gradual, though unmistakable transformation. As Redlaw observes the Tetterby children joyfully "thronging about . . . caress[ing]" Milly and notes the "renewed contentment and affection of their parents" (Dickens 399), he reflects with profound regret and shame on the sorrow and discord that he had brought to this family. At the same time, he acknowledges that,



Fig. 1 "Milly and the Children"

had it not been for Milly, he might still be "diffusing" his "unwholesome blight" upon them. When he accompanies Milly home to her husband and father-in-law, Redlaw again witnesses another seemingly miraculous change. As Milly enters the Lodge, William and Philip Swidger "both started, and turned round towards her, and a radiant change came upon their faces . . . Pleased to see her! Pleasure was no word for it." The overwhelming resentment that William had previously shown toward his father in Redlaw's presence completely dissipates. The transmission of affect is complete as the elder Swidger and his son suddenly awaken from what they can only describe as "an ugly sort of dream":

It was quite a sight to see Mr. William shaking hands with his father, and patting him on the back, and rubbing him gently down with his hand, as if he could not possibly do enough to show an interest in him.

"What a wonderful man you are, father!" (400)

Ultimately, Redlaw's "fatal gift" is reversed by the power of Milly Swidger's positive affect: "He redeemed, through Milly, more and more of the evil he had done, and as he was more and more with her, this change ripened itself within him" (399).

The guiding question of Mauss's investigations into gift exchange across cultures was, "What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?" Dickens understood that the power of the gift resides in its emotional value.²⁴ After reading *The Chimes* (his second Christmas book) to a group of friends, Dickens reported to his wife Catherine, "If you could have seen Macready last night undisguisedly sobbing, and crying on the sofa, as I read—you would have felt (as I did) what a thing it is to have

²⁴ For Mauss, the emotional value of the gift always supersedes its material value.

Power" (*Letters* 4:235; emphasis added). Indeed, Slater notes that it was in the mid-1840s particularly, "as a result of the intensity of readers' reactions to the life and death of Little Nell [that] Dickens's sense of his relationship with his public, and the peculiar power over it that he exercised had deepened" (171).²⁵ And while Anthony Trollope attempted to dismiss Dickens as "Mr. Popular Sentiment,"²⁶ Robert Louis Stevenson, writing of the Christmas books, declared he

had cried his eyes out, and had a terrible fight not to sob. But oh, dear God, they are good—and I feel so good after them, and would do anything, yes and shall do everything, to make it better for people. I wish I could lose no time; I want to go out and comfort someone . . . I shall give money . . . O what a jolly thing it is for a man to have written books like these books. (*Letters* 52-53)

Though Redlaw himself never fully understands the nature of his power—"he did not know in what part of himself his new power resided, or how it was communicated, or how the manner of its reception varied in different person" (Dickens 361)—Dickens understood how bodies affect other bodies. He understood, specifically, the ways in which emotions work to shape individual and collective bodies. To George Hogarth, he wrote: "I have no doubt of [*The Haunted Man*] doing me good with all thoughtful readers" (*Letters* 5:457). As Deleuze and Guattari have observed, "A great novelist is above all an artist who invents unknown or unrecognized affects and brings them to light as the becoming of his characters" (174).²⁷ Indeed, Dickens's concern both intra-textually and extra-textually with human psychology generally and emotional contagion specifically anticipates the findings of modern neuroscience by treating the mind as "embodied"—our mind is shaped by our bodies and by the types of perceptual experiences we have as we navigate through and interact with the surrounding world.

Coastal Carolina University

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²⁵ *The Old Curiosity Shop* (the so-called story of Little Nell) was extravagantly admired among contemporary readers for its ennobling appeal to emotion; Forster notes it provided "a kind of discipline of feeling and emotion which would do me lasting good" (*Letters* 2:187).

²⁶ In Chapter 15 of Trollope's *The Warden* "Mr. Popular Sentiment" is depicted as a serial novelist "of all reformers . . . the most powerful" (my emphasis).

²⁷ Affect, for Deleuze and Guattari, is closely linked with transformation.

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AGNES WICKFIELD AND VICTORIAN MARIOLATRY

BY MARK ESLICK

David Copperfield's Agnes Wickfield is one of Dickens's much maligned characters, typically criticized as a sentimental abstraction that the author had failed fully to realize.¹ John Forster agrees, preferring Dora, the "child wife" of David Copperfield (Dickens 769) to the "unfailing wisdom and self-sacrificing goodness" of Agnes (Forster III.39). Forster's judgment has been echoed by many critics; George Orwell, for example, memorably dismissed her as "the most disagreeable of [Dickens's] heroines, the real legless angel of Victorian romance" (109). In a broadly realistic novel, Agnes's position as a vaguely emblematic figure has not been well-received; however, a fascinating observation in many criticisms of Agnes is her resemblance to the Madonna.² Victorian Protestants were generally hostile towards Catholics' worship of the Virgin Mary; and yet Madonna-figures were a feature of many works by Victorian Protestant writers who associated female characters with the Virgin Mary in order to inscribe a feminine ideal. Lady Castlewood in Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*, Wilkie Collins's heroine in *Hide and Seek*, and Dorothea Brooke in Eliot's *Middlemarch* are some of the better known Victorian characters associated with Marian qualities. Agnes Wickfield can certainly be situated within this gallery of highly-popular, secularized, domesticated Madonnas; she is a paragon of gentleness, sweetness, sisterly affection, motherly nurture, domestic service, fidelity, and self-sacrifice. Yet Dickens's portrait of Agnes as a saintly Madonna-figure is more complex than many Protestant portraits; he may have rejected Catholic Mariolatry, but Agnes's distinctly Catholic associations suggest that he was emotionally open to imagery not found in the Church of England.

Victorian Anti-Mariolatry

Anti-Marianism was an important strand of nineteenth-century Victorian hostility towards Catholicism. A primary marker of Roman Catholicism, the Virgin Mary became an increasingly controversial figure following the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act, when Marian devotion became visible in England.³ Victorian Catholics, emboldened by their civic status, began invoking the Virgin Mary in public devotion and through artistic expression. Daniel O'Connell, the driving force behind Catholic emancipation, for example, could often be seen praying with rosary beads outside the Houses of Parliament, a sight unlikely to have been witnessed since 1688.⁴ During the early decades of the Victorian era, Mariolatry was more forcefully introduced to Protestants, through devotional images outside Catholic churches and such pictorial representations as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. Protestant reaction to the revived cult of the Virgin Mary was hostile. Although theologically, Mary did serve as a model of

¹ See, for example, R. H. Hutton (474-75).

² For example, Michael Slater notes the "Madonna-like presentation of Agnes" (100) and Vincent Newey calls her a "secular Madonna" (155).

³ See John Singleton (16-34)

⁴ See Peter O. O'Dwyer (259-62).

faith for Protestants, it was argued that there was no basis for such worship in the New Testament and no evidence to suggest Mary was worshiped during the first four centuries of Christianity.⁵ A more persistent theological objection was that praying to Mary reduced the role of Jesus: "the most blessed Virgin is exalted by the Romish Church into an object of worship, and invested with a power, unwarranted by Scripture, above that held by her gracious Son, our Lord and Saviour" ("Cardinal" 291). Protestants found Catholic artworks of the Madonna and Child particularly objectionable, claiming that such images infantilized Jesus and magnified Mary's power. The anti-Roman Catholic and anti-Tractarian Reverend Michael Hobart Seymour, for example, argued that "representing Mary as enthroned in heaven, and our Lord as a child in her arms" was "ignorant, absurd, and untrue," as it made Jesus subject to Mary's will and "was an awful dishonour to Christ" (58). Popular anti-Catholicism denounced Marian images and invocations as signs and symbols of a dangerous, foreign religion; the worship of Mary was idolatrous, evidence of "the absolute conformity of modern popery to ancient paganism" (Hampson n.p.).⁶ A common charge was that the Madonna was simply a newer version of such pagan goddesses as Juno, Isis, and Minerva.⁷ Victorian anti-Catholics therefore denounced the cult of the Virgin Mary to portray Catholicism as an unenlightened and alien religion; the novelist Catherine Sinclair spoke for many when she declared, "The religion now taught by Romanists cannot be called Christianity, but is Mariolatry, a perfectly different faith" (xxi). Religious difference was not the only reason the Virgin Mary became a controversial figure; conflict between Protestants and Catholics had persisted since the sixteenth century, although Marian imagery did not become the subject of intense debate until the nineteenth century. As Carol Herringer Engelhardt explains, this was "the same period in which the feminine ideal—that contradictory, ever-evolving image of woman as the embodiment of selfless, sexless love—was ascendant"; further, the "timing as well as the content of the Marian debates suggests that the other significant factor in inspiring them was the anxious attempt, characteristic of much Victorian discourse, to define woman's nature and duties" (19-20). Protestants' discomfort with the Virgin Mary therefore reflects a cultural concern about the role of women, especially because she closely resembled the Victorian paradigm of the feminine ideal known as the Angel-in-the-House.⁸ But this portrayal of females as secular Madonnas was problematic: traditional Christian portraits of the Virgin Mary as a powerful woman threatened masculine authority as it challenged the limited view of female capability embodied in the idea of the Angel in the House. Thus, although generally Mary was viewed positively by Protestants, following the Marian revival they constructed a more passive view of her as a figure who had "meekly . . . yielded up her entire self, body, soul, and spirit, to the will of the Highest" (Dobney n.p.). It was Mary's virginity, however, that was the most vexed issue in the Marian controversy. Many Protestants viewed the Catholic belief in her perpetual virginity as suspect because it opposed the

⁵ See Michael P. Carroll (4).

⁶ See also William Cunningham, (339-65).

⁷ See Michael Hobart Seymour (597); T. R. Birks (19); and Catherine Sinclair (xxi).

⁸ Sally Cunneen has shown that "Mary seemed . . . much like the Victorian [feminine] ideal" (256). Kimberley van Esveld Adams has also discussed how "the Angel of the House" became synonymous with "the domestic Madonna, who is one of the most familiar icons of Victorian womanhood" (89).

dominant Victorian patriarchal family values. Virginity was an important feature of the feminine ideal, but only until marriage. Protestantism did not reject the idea of the Virgin Birth but denied Mary's lifelong virginity by reference to scripture. According to a popular pamphlet entitled *The Virgin Mary, a married woman*: "No restriction whatever was placed on Joseph or Mary when the mysterious incarnation of Christ was revealed to them, but rather the contrary" (7). Therefore, competing images of the Madonna emerged in the Victorian era: a Catholic Virgin Mary, a "sinless virgin mother who retained her extraordinary influence with her son throughout eternity," and a Protestant Virgin Mary who had "a limited maternal role, bore subsequent children, and shared with all humans the guilt of both original and actual sin" (Herringer 21). Dickens shared the Protestant dislike of Mariolatry; in *Pictures from Italy*, for example, he is generally hostile to the worship of Mary, describing a Marian statue as a "blunt-nosed little Virgin . . . enshrined in a plaster Punch's show" (66). The book's images of Italians praying to the Virgin are punctuated with ironic asides; this, and his ridiculing such customs as making "a vow to the Madonna to wear nothing but blue for a year or two" no doubt offended Catholic readers (50).⁹ Elsewhere, Dickens's representations of Mary conform to the Protestant version of her limited role in Jesus's life. In Dickens's *The Life of Our Lord*, for example, Mary is only briefly mentioned at the nativity, the marriage at Cana, and the Crucifixion; nowhere does he mention the Annunciation, the Virgin Birth, or the Assumption. Mary is not invested with qualities that lift her into the realm of the divine; she is portrayed as a kind, gentle mother-figure but, essentially, an ordinary woman. At the Crucifixion, she is only one of a group of women that "God blessed . . . for their true and tender hearts" (469).

Angels-in-the-House

Perhaps Dickens could not (or would not) submit to Catholic Mariolatry; yet his fiction reveals a series of female characters, culminating in Agnes Wickfield and resonating with the era's "semisecularized forms of sentimental heroines" (Lootens 53). As Eric Trudgill shows, from the 1830s onwards a vogue began among Protestant novelists, many of them anti-Catholic, for domesticated and passive female characters who represented a patriarchal ideal of womanhood that was invested with the physical and spiritual imagery of the Madonna.

Unlike many fictional Marian-types, Agnes is not invested with the traditional physical traits of the Madonna or explicitly connected with her; she does not have blue eyes or wear a veil, nor does her life story reflect Mary's. Yet, images commonly associated with the Madonna surround her, and she is repeatedly linked with the moon and the stars. David tells Uriah that Agnes is "the moon herself" (580), and Mr. Micawber calls her "the only starry spot in a miserable existence" (713); when "the moon is shining," Agnes is portrayed "with her quiet eyes raised up to it" (868). As Marina Warner explains, the moon and stars, symbols of the feminine nourishment of life, are associated with Mary,¹⁰ an association strengthened by accounts of Saint Catherine Labouré's vision of

⁹ *Pictures from Italy's* treatment of the Virgin Mary led the *Dublin Review* to state that Dickens's comments "on the devotion of the Italian people" to the Virgin Mary were "in special-degree blasphemously and freezingly sportive" ("Dickens's Pictures" 190).

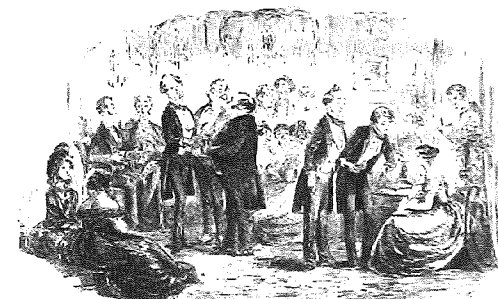
¹⁰ See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (255-69).

the Virgin Mary with the moon at her feet (Paris 1830).¹¹ Perhaps the most powerful image of this association in *David Copperfield* is Dora's death-scene; David notes that the "bright moon is high and clear" (773) and, when Agnes comes to tell him Dora is dead, the accompanying illustration shows her framed by a window through which we see a cross on a church steeple and the moon and a bright star directly above her (Fig. 1). But the identification of Agnes as a secular Madonna-figure is most pronounced through her



My child-wife's old companion

Fig. 1 "My child-wife's old companion" (Phiz)



Each brand in hovering near us at the dawn of day

Fig. 2 "Uriah persists in hovering near us" (Phiz)

¹¹ Saint Catherine Labouré's vision of the moon at Mary's feet first mirrors Revelation 12:1, in which Mary is "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars."

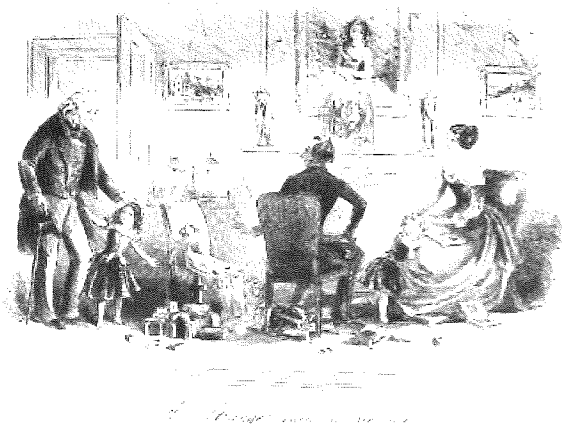


Fig. 3 "A Stranger calls to see me" (Phiz)

being an "angel." As Adams argues, the "Victorian Angel" is the "domestic and Protestant descendant of the Madonna" (228). Agnes is David's "good angel," "better angel," and "guardian angel," "the better angel of the lives of all who come within her calm, good, self-denying influence" (374, 384, 619, 278). Phiz's illustrations reinforce this angelic image; in two of the five illustrations of Agnes, statues of angels are placed directly above her head on a hearth (Figs. 2 & 3).

Agnes exudes a quasi-religious quality inherent in Angel-in-the-House imagery; she is inscribed with Protestant ideals of the Virgin Mary that envisioned a limited role for women and a benign femininity as the idealization of perfect womanhood: a devoted, self-sacrificing daughter to her incompetent, alcoholic father; a chaste sister-figure for whom David has a "sisterly affection"; and a faithful wife, once David finally recognizes that his love for her is more than that of a brother (822, 823, 846). Dickens constructs this characterization through a litany of clichéd adjectives—"placid," "sweet," "bright," "tranquil," "staid," "good," "calm," "pleasant" (233)—that are used repeatedly. As Vincent Newey notes, these are at once a catalogue of "cardinal virtues and an inventory of limitations" (159). Agnes's subservience to male figures certainly does limit her sphere of action: she is rarely seen outside the walls of her home and is passive in the extreme; yet it is her position as a paragon of domestic virtue that most forcefully aligns her with the feminine ideal. From the moment she is introduced, Agnes is marked as a "little housekeeper"; she has "a little basket-trifle hanging at her side, with keys in it" and looks "as staid and as discreet a housekeeper as the old house could have" (233). Years later, upon David's memorable return to the Wickfield house, the keys are "still hanging by her side" (845). Even when David comes to be romantically attached to her, Agnes's consummate housekeeping is a central part of his love for her: "my domestic joy was perfect, I had been married ten happy years" (871). Thus, as Q. D. Leavis argues, Agnes can be read as a "willed concession to the Victorian ideal—seen always as the angel on

the hearth" (65). But Agnes does not entirely support a constrictive domestic ideology; she is not simply a sweet-faced housewife but a virtuous and competent figure with feminist potential.¹² Her position as a school-teacher may be an extension of her domestic and motherly duties, but the role lifts her out of this realm. It is, as Newey argues, "an advance for the middle-class woman . . . decidedly more than is achieved by the other female characters in *David Copperfield*" (159). Agnes's intellectual capabilities are superior; she is not simply a creature of feeling; as Betsey Trotwood says, Agnes has a "wise head" (Dickens 518), while Dora asserts she is "too clever" (616). David also recognizes Agnes's intellect, acknowledging that her appetite for literature matches his own, rendering her his equal or near-equal. A thinking moral agent who consciously resists her feelings for David, she is marked by a gravitas the other female characters lack. *Earnest* is an epithet frequently attributed to her: she is "always earnest" and "very earnest," "her letter was earnest," she is "so earnest," she "wrote a few earnest words" (374, 609, 616, 704). More than a muse for David, she is central to his creativity. The inspirational letters she sends to him, culminating in the one he receives during his journey of reflection through Europe after Dora's death, both renew his creative urges and redefine his writing. Far from the asexuality required of Marys and Angels, Agnes blushes when David talks of falling in love (285); her confession "I have loved you all my life!" exposes the sorrow and pain she concealed when he married Dora (868). In many ways, Dickens inscribes for Agnes a life far more complex than that of a paragon of domestic virtue or wifely passivity.

Angels and Mariolatry

Viewed as a supreme example of Dickens's obsession with domestic angels, young virgins and, indeed, the consecrated memory of Mary Hogarth,¹³ Agnes has been called a "disaster" (Bloom 7), "a bit of a bore" (Lucas 198) and "too perfect even to be likeable" (Garnett 54). Critic Michael Slater is particularly scathing, calling her "a major embarrassment for Dickens's readers . . . It would be a bold critic indeed, who would claim this character to be a success"; Agnes is "inert" and "passive," one of several female creations invested with the "sanctified memory" of Mary Hogarth, an association that "invariably inhibited Dickens's prodigious powers as a creator of character" (250-51). Yet these readings fail to recognize that Dickens was more than just a realist novelist: he was fascinated with character extremes, good and bad. Agnes is not meant to be a lifelike representation of a real woman, as attempts to uncover a greater significance for her have shown. Alexander Welsh argues that she is an angel of death; J. Hillis Miller views her as a more general religious figure that reinforces belief in an age when religion was being eroded; and Stanley Friedman sees her as the inspiration for David's faith.¹⁴ Valuable as these readings are, especially their recognition that the impulse behind Agnes's creation is fundamentally religious, they portray her as sterile with relatively little detailed attention paid to the particular words and figures employed to construct her. One way to move beyond this is by exploring Agnes's Marian qualities; although she resonates with an ideal

¹² Adams's study of the feminist potential of secular Madonnas in Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot argues that these writers "were quite unusual among their English-speaking and Protestant contemporaries in seeing feminist possibilities in the Madonna" (2).

¹³ Agnes appears to be modeled on Mary Hogarth; Dickens's "curious dream" of Mary as an apotheosis of the Madonna emphasizes the character's Marian traits. See Forster (2: 122-24).

¹⁴ See Welsh (180-95), Miller (156-58), and Friedman (128-50).

defined by limitations and a benign femininity, she in many ways transcends the Protestant image of the secular Madonna. There are forces at play in the novel that seem to align her with a decidedly Catholic-flavoured Mariolatry; Agnes is for David, as the Virgin Mary is for Catholics, a religious icon and an object of devotion, an intercessor and spiritual guide. *David Copperfield*, especially through the dominant motif of Agnes "pointing upward" (883) and her association with a "stained glass window" (233), presents a Catholic-inspired Madonna-figure through which Dickens explores fundamental questions provoked by competing Victorian images of the Madonna.

The motif of Agnes pointing upward, an idea associated with the character's failure, aligns her with Catholic Mariolatry by suggesting her role as a heavenly mediator for David. A fundamental difference between nineteenth-century Catholic and Protestant conceptions of Mary concerned her role as intercessor. Roman Catholics prayed to the Virgin, or through her to God, because, as Cardinal Newman wrote, they held that "her office above is one of perpetual intercession for the faithful" (II.73). According to *A novena in honour of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary*, Catholics believed these prayers to be effective as "the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin Mary is a most powerful method of obtaining benefits and favours from the Majesty of God; since . . . Her dear Son will not deny Her any thing which She asks of Him" (3). Protestants, however, did not generally believe in the efficacy of praying to Mary, and widely regarded it as idolatrous and symbolic of Catholic ignorance and superstition. Agnes is certainly constructed as a kind of mediator. For David, she is a "benignant, gentle angel" to whom he always turns for aid and comfort; she is his "counsellor" and "guide," a constant source of "comfort and support," "advice" and "help," his only relief from the vague feeling he repeatedly alludes to of an "old unhappy loss or want of something" (432, 278, 867, 573, 609, 822, 823). Whenever he does not have her to "advise and approve," David becomes "wild" and gets "into all sorts of difficulties" (574):

What I am, you have made me, Agnes . . . ever leading me to something better; ever directing me to higher things . . . I want you to know, yet don't know how to tell you, that all my life long I shall look up to you, and be guided by you, as I have been through the darkness that is past. Whatever betides, whatever new ties you may form, whatever changes may come between us, I shall always look to you, and love you, as I do now, and have always done. You will always be my solace and resource, as you have always been. Until I die, my dearest sister, I shall see you always before me, pointing upward! (848)

David recognizes that he has been, and will continue to be, sustained by the intercessory love of Agnes. But he is also deeply invested in her role as divine mediator between heaven and earth—"directing me to higher things"—and the idea that she will lead him from "darkness." Other characters in the novel also view Agnes as a spiritual guide, something David registers when he tells her, "Everyone who knows you, consults with you, and is guided by you" (284); even Mrs. Heep, following the exposure of Uriah's deception, is seen "crying on her knees to Agnes to interfere in their behalf" (764). In a rather odd moment, when David thinks he sees Agnes aboard the ship taking emigrants to Australia, there is a suggestion that she acts as a kind of holy guide for the fallen Little Emily. Though David is unsure whether the figure he sees is Agnes, Phiz's illustration

clearly shows her in the top left hand corner, with a pointed finger, sitting next to Emily, wearing a shawl akin to a veil and her head bowed as if in prayer (Fig. 4).

Catholic theology regarding the Virgin Mary's power of mediation held her jurisdiction over death to be supreme. As Marina Warner explains, "by far her greatest function in the Catholic scheme of salvation is to relieve the sufferings of sinners after death. She is 'the mother of mercy,' the 'life, sweetness, and hope' of the fallen, the advocate who pleads for humanity's cause before the judgement seat of God" (316). Catholics therefore prayed to the merciful Mary, most notably in the best-loved prayer in Catholicism, the Hail Mary, to intercede on their behalf and "pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."



Fig. 4 "The Emigrants" (Phiz)

David Copperfield is permeated with images of death. Figurative expressions relating to death occur again and again, and there is an emphasis on mortality throughout.¹⁵ Actual deaths fill the book, the most memorable being Clara Copperfield, Dora, Mr. Spenlow, Barkis, Steerforth, and Ham. But the narrator, the mature David, notes that other deaths occurred during the course of the narrative; it is indeed David's obsession with death that is most pronounced.¹⁶ Early calling himself a "posthumous child" (Dickens 14), his morbid fear of death punctuates every stage of his life; on the journey to Dover, he fears "being found dead in a day or two, under some hedge" (190). He recognizes the sound of coffin-making at Mr. Omer's as "the tune that never *does* leave off" (314), and refers to death as "that great Visitor, before whose presence all the living must give place" (444). Of Dora's death, he broods about "the many, never old, who lived and loved and died" (747); clearly, David is immersed in thoughts of death. Agnes's function as mediator first occurs following Dora's death, when she signals to David with a "solemn hand upraised towards Heaven" (774). Agnes is the image of holiness: "when she stood before me with

¹⁵ Friedman notes that in more than a third of *David Copperfield* there is "either some direct reference to mortality or else a figurative expression using the idea of death" (128-50).

¹⁶ The includes: David's father, David's infant brother, Dora's unborn child, Agnes's mother, Betsey Trotwood's husband, Emily's father and mother, Ham's father, Mrs. Gummidge's husband, Mrs. Chillip's first-wife, Traddles's uncle, Steerforth's father, Mrs. Micawber's parents, Uriah's father, Rosa Dartle's parents, Annie Strong's father, Mr. Dick's father, and Jip the dog.

her upraised hand, she was like a sacred presence" who seemed to come "from a purer region nearer heaven" (776).¹⁷ She consoles David's "undisciplined heart" by "softening its pain," just as she has eased the transition of Dora's soul from this world to the next: "When the Angel of Death alighted there, my child-wife fell asleep—they told me so when I could bear to hear it—on her bosom, with a smile." But it is Agnes as a heavenly mediator of his own death that ultimately concerns David; even before the demise of Dora, he thought of her in this role. Watching Agnes take care of her father, David muses: "I pray Heaven that I never may forget the dear girl in her love and truth, at that time of my life; for if I should, I must be drawing near the end, and then I would desire to remember her best" (525). Married to Dora, he dwells on memories of the old "contented days with Agnes, in the dear old house," arising in his mind "like spectres of the dead, that might have some renewal in another world" (703). From the time of Dora's death until his marriage to Agnes, however, he repeatedly evokes the image of her "softening influence" (821):

You remember, when you came down to me in our little room—pointing upward Agnes? . . . Until I die, my dearest sister, I shall see you always before me, pointing upward! . . . I had faithfully set the seal upon the Past, and, thinking of her, pointing upward, thought of her as pointing to that sky above me, where, in the mystery to come, I might yet love her with a love unknown on earth. (848-49)

Alexander Welsh argues that David's dwelling on the image of Agnes as a figure of death implies both a strange fear of and attraction to this "familiar of death," as she cannot invite him to the "sky above" without inviting his death: "Agnes ought instinctively to be feared as well as worshiped" (182). Yet David's words anticipate the most enduring image of Agnes, pointing upward at the end of the novel, and suggest that her presence will offer him divine consolation at the moment of his death.

This final image of Agnes comes in almost prayer-like form. For David, the poor orphan transformed into a famous novelist with a loving wife and family, the last great problem of his life is how to face his death:

And now, as I close my task, subduing my desire to linger yet, these faces fade away. But, one face, shining on me like a Heavenly light by which I see all other objects, is above them and beyond them all. And that remains . . . I turn my head, and see it, in its beautiful serenity, beside me. My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company . . . O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward! (Dickens 882)

David's "prayer" invites a double reading aligning the novel's end with life's end and reflects a persistent theme celebrating the redemptive powers of women; indeed, this

¹⁷ Garnett makes a similar point: "It is not really Agnes pointing up, but Dickens himself directing us to her heavenly provenance and meaning, just as medieval painters signified the Holy Spirit by a dove, or saintliness by a gilded halo" (54).

concluding prayer feeds into a widely-held Victorian ideology about the exalted function of women at the moment of death.¹⁸ Agnes is etherealized, spiritualized, a kind of fuzzy "presence" or "Heavenly light," a spirit-figure of moral radiance despite her roles as wife and mother. She is, for David, so far "above" and "beyond" ordinary women that she is detached from carnal appetites and desires. Like Catholic prayers to the Madonna, David's concluding "prayer" does not ask for direct action to grant the ultimate object of the "prayer" but simply for Agnes to be an intercessor and be near him at the close of life. His moment of death is thus transformed from one of terror to one of joyful calm. *David Copperfield*, as Stanley Friedman argues, seems more concerned with emphasizing "compensation on earth, rather than in heaven, for unmerited suffering" (147). But through the character of Agnes Wickfield, Dickens explores a vision of mortality steeped in Catholic thought as a Marian-type figure eases the passage of David's soul from this world to the next by mediating between the departing spirit and God. Yet this was not the first time Dickens had explored such a vision; Little Nell, like David, is a character who frequently dwells upon the terrors of death. The thought of death prompts her to "shudder" and, imagining the death of her grandfather, she does so in a way that is "too horrible to dwell upon" (Dickens, *OCS* 78). But for Nell, who dies surrounded by the vestiges of Catholicism with the image of Madonna and Child carved on the headboard of her death-bed, the terror of her own death is mitigated by its Catholic context. As she sits among the tombs she has a feeling of "calm delight" and "now she was happy, and at rest . . . What if the spot awakened thoughts of death! Die who would, it would still remain the same; these sights and sounds would still go on, as happily as ever. It would be no pain to sleep amidst them" (401-03). As Malcolm Andrews notes, "the physical realities of death seem to disappear for Nell" (29).¹⁹ The second motif is Agnes's association with a stained glass window. According to Slater, "The fact that David's perception of Agnes's nature never changes from the moment in his childhood when he first sees her, also as a child, and at once thinks of a figure in a stained glass window has much to do with the reader's inability to credit her with more than the single dimension such a figure has" (248). However, this association can be read in more subtle and complex ways, beginning with their first meeting:

I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us, above, I thought of that window; and that I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards. (Dickens 233)

He returns to this image on three more occasions: "I feel that there are goodness, peace and truth, wherever Agnes is; and the soft light of the coloured window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always, and on me when I am near her, and on everything around"

¹⁸ "Woman," an 1843 article by Mrs. Edward Thomas, reflects this ideology. "It is for woman - tender, sympathizing, watching, prayerful woman - alone to comprehend those struggles, alone to soothe them, alone to invoke mercy and forgiveness for them, alone to feel the blessed assurance that her prayers are gone up an acceptable sacrifice before the throne of the Most High, alone to indulge the hope that him she mourneth as dead has awakened to life and immortality in the cloudless realms of everlasting light" (319).

¹⁹ Schiefelbein writes of the Marian imagery surrounding Little Nell: "Nell becomes, like the Virgin Mary engraved on her bed, finally elevated to the level of legendary. Just as the Virgin lives on in the popular Marian cult that celebrates her Assumption, so Nell gains immortality in the great death-bed description in which she is preserved exactly as she was in life" (94).

(242). Seeing her in London years later, he speaks of how he associates her “face” with the “softened beauty” of the “stained glass window in the church” (515). Finally, following the death of Dora, he says of Agnes: “I began to think that in my old association of her with the stained glass-window in the church, a prophetic foreshadowing of what she would be to me, in the calamity that was to happen in the fullness of time, had found a way into my mind” (776). Far from David’s perception of an unchanging Agnes, a definite progression marks each association, reflected in the intensification of her religious significance: from having a “Heavenly face,” she becomes a “sacred presence” which David guards with “religious care” (573, 776, 846).

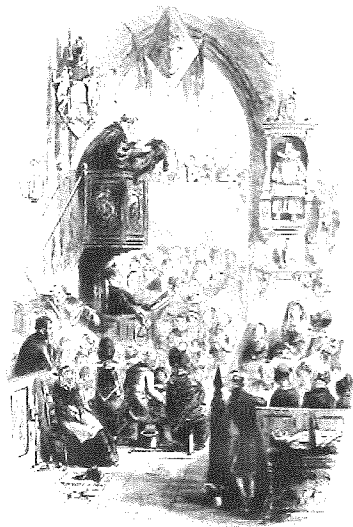


Fig.5 “Our Pew at Church” (Phiz)

(868). David’s perception of Agnes is complex, as she is simultaneously a sister-figure, a mother-substitute, and as his wife, an object of desire.

Agnes’s identification with stained glass windows associates her with David’s mother, Clara; Agnes, who bears a striking resemblance to Clara, evokes the “tranquil brightness” of a window that he once saw but cannot remember “where or when” (233). But there is such a window in his past—in the village church next to his childhood home, Blunderstone Rookery,²⁰ which plays a vital role in his life as a symbol of stability associated with his mother. One of his earliest childhood memories is of sitting inside the church beside his mother and Peggotty:

Here is our pew in the church. What a high-backed pew! With a window near it, out of which our house can be seen, and is seen many times during the morning’s service by Peggotty, who likes to make herself sure as she can that it’s not being robbed, or is not in flames. (27)

²⁰ Arlene M. Jackson has previously identified the window in Blunderstone Rookery as the stained glass window that David associates with Agnes (53-65).

David recalls the “sunlight coming in at the open door,” and he thinks the pulpit is “a good place to play in, and what a castle it would make”; his “eyes gradually shut up; and from seeming to hear the clergyman singing a drowsy song in the heat, I hear nothing, until I fall off the seat with a crash” and is taken out by Peggotty (27-28). The scene is suffused with an idyllic sense of the innocence and security of his early life, especially before the arrival of Mr. Murdstone, when churchgoing becomes a thoroughly dismal affair. Represented in Phiz’s illustration of the scene, entitled “Our Pew at Church” (Fig. 5), this is not the window that David associates with Agnes. High up in the illustration, behind the choir seated upstairs, is a window that Phiz seems to represent as stained glass which has streams of light coming through to illuminate the congregation below. Dickens, who collaborated closely with his illustrators and had final approval of the plates, creates an intriguing effect in this separation of text and illustration.²¹ David’s inability to recollect the subject of the window becomes apparent because it has no subject. By not including this window in the textual version of David’s childhood memory of the church, Dickens and Phiz imply there is such a window in his childhood, and its association with Agnes is inextricably linked with the warmth, love, and protection of his mother.

This childhood memory is also bound up with Canterbury, a city dominated by a cathedral that boasts some of the oldest stained glass in England.²² Having escaped from the Murdstone and Grinby factory to find his aunt Betsey, David again associates his mother with a church motif:

I seemed to be sustained and led on by my fanciful picture of my mother in her youth, before I came into the world. It always kept me company. It was there, among the hops, when I lay down to sleep; it was with me on my waking in the morning; it went before me all day. I have associated it, ever since, with the sunny street of Canterbury, dozing as it were in the hot light; and with the sight of its old houses and gateways, and the stately, grey Cathedral, with the rooks sailing round the towers. (198)

This resonates with David’s earlier church memory. Importantly, each is preceded by him feeling “afraid” (27) or “frightened” (198) and ends with an image of his falling asleep to reveal a complex memory process that suggests he recalls the childhood comfort of his mother when he is threatened or anxious. Since David’s mother has no apparent connection with Canterbury, he projects the safety and stability of his earlier churchgoing experience with his mother onto Canterbury and its Cathedral, a romanticization inseparable from Agnes.²³ As he says, “Strange to say, that quiet influence which was inseparable in my mind from Agnes, seemed to pervade even the old city where she dwelt . . . everywhere—on everything—I felt the same serene air, the same calm, thoughtful softening spirit” (570). Significantly, throughout the text there are subtle images associating her with the cathedral; even the Wickfield house is invested with several of the same architectural

²¹ For a detailed account of Dickens’s working relationship with his illustrators see Jane R. Cohen, *Charles Dickens and His Original Illustrators* (1980).

²² See Clifton-Taylor for a history of Canterbury Cathedral’s windows (73-75).

²³ This association is reinforced by David’s later memory of sitting in Canterbury Cathedral and feeling a “sensation of the world being shut out” as “the resounding of the organ through the black and white arched galleries and aisles, are wings that take me back” (275), an image figuring the Cathedral as a womb-like refuge from the world.

features, "quaint little panes of glass, and quainter little windows" (228).²⁴ Though David finds it "strange" that the city has the same calming effect on him as Agnes, his vague memories and associations indicate he has transferred his earliest childhood memory of being in church with his mother onto a more general church image. His attraction to Agnes is therefore tied to the love and security he experienced with his mother as they sat in church on Sundays beneath the sunlight from the stained glass window.

Perhaps the richest (and strangest) association of Agnes with the window occurs immediately after Dora's death, the only moment in the novel when the two dominant motifs of Agnes are juxtaposed:

I began to think that in my old association of her with the stained-glass window in the church, a prophetic foreshadowing of that she would be to me, in the calamity that was to happen in the fullness of time, had found a way into my mind. In all that sorrow, from the moment, never to be forgotten, when she stood before me with her upraised hand, she was like a sacred presence in my lonely house. (776)

To unravel what this "prophetic foreshadowing" of the "calamity that was to happen" is, we need to understand the relationship between David and Dora. For all Agnes's virtues, she is not David's first choice as wife; instead, he marries Dora Spenslow, a "child-wife" (769) who bears a strong resemblance to Clara Copperfield. Dora is physically "diminutive" (399) in the same way that Clara is like a "wax-doll" (15); both are charming but inept housekeepers. Although at first deeply attracted to Dora's childlike innocence and impractical ways, David (like his father with Clara) begins to realize that his wife imperils the domestic ideal she is supposed to embody and enforce, as the couple fall prey to thieving servants and exploitative tradesmen. Nevertheless, David's falling in love with and marrying Dora can be read as an attempt to revive his relationship with his dead mother;²⁵ by triggering another association of Agnes with the stained-glass window, Dora's death suggests that the first time David saw the village church window may actually have been at his mother's funeral and that he is gradually realizing this. He associates Agnes with his mother, "a prophetic foreshadowing" (776) in that she is present when Dora, the mother-substitute, dies. The window symbolizes the deaths of the beloved mother and mother-substitute. Like the Virgin Mary, Agnes is a perfect, transcendent mother-figure who, even when one's real mother is dead, lives on and remains "wholly unaltered" (862).

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²⁴ Also, Canterbury Cathedral and the Wickfield House both have gargoyles. In an almost grotesque inversion of Agnes's association with a stained glass window, David associates this frightening architectural feature with Uriah Heep, who looks "uncommonly like the carved face . . . eyeing me sideways, with his mouth widened, and the creases in his cheeks" (244).

²⁵ From his wedding day, David subconsciously knew that Dora was not the mother-substitute he sought. He walks down the aisle with Dora "through a mist of half-seen people, pulpits, monuments, pews, fonts, organs, and church windows, in which there flutter faint airs of association with my childish church at home, so long ago" (639). David comes close here to remembering the window and its associations with his mother, but, unlike the association of Agnes with stained glass window, this memory is even more vague and general.

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THE DEVIL YOU KNOW:
SENTIMENTALISM AND GOTHIC THREAT IN
THE PICKWICK PAPERS AND THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

BY BRAD FRUHAUFF

In *Victorian Hauntings*, Julian Wolfreys argues that Charles Dickens works with a self-conscious "comic-gothic" in the main narrative of *The Pickwick Papers*, specifically in the form of Joe, the "fat boy" (27). When the "spinster aunt," for whom Joe had been a trustworthy if recalcitrant assistant, baselessly interprets his strange behavior as a sudden intention to do her harm, he proclaims, "I wants to make your flesh creep!" (Dickens 104). Interestingly, from this first novel, Dickens models the melodramatic tendencies of a form he continued to rely on throughout his career. This suggests an attempt on his part to achieve some distance from the world of eighteenth-century literature that shaped much of his childhood imagination—not in order to make a clean break but to appropriate and redeploy it freely, without mechanical imitation. One important and rather unnoticed consequence of this struggle with his mental furniture was perhaps difficult to see prior to "the ethical turn" in literary studies, if by this we mean an interest in the nature and structure of our intersubjective being.¹ A key idea for scholars of this ethical turn is "the other," that is, the conceptual, logical, or relational term that marks a difference from the self (sometimes identified with a logic of "sameness").

Ethics can be understood conceptually as a description of the self's relation to this other. For Dickens, Gothic and sentimental conventions are themselves ethically loaded in the sense that they are literary structures for engaging ethical questions of otherness. Indeed, from his earliest novels, the conventional scenes and encounters of these genres often become sites of ethical inquiry and engagement. Although in *The Pickwick Papers* the sentimental and Gothic are usually parodied in the main narrative, Dickens uses the interpolated tales to open up gaps in the text which call for an ethical response. *The Old Curiosity Shop*, by comparison, stages a confrontation between Nell as sentimental innocent and Gothic predators Quilp and her grandfather. In both, Gothic moments serve to raise the specter that the world is inhospitable to ethical action or goodness, while sentimental response counters this anxiety with a common hope precisely that ethical actions matter. In their ethical valence, these two modes prove to be two sides of a single intersubjective coin: sentimental moments can suddenly turn Gothic, and vice versa. Examining the relationships between Gothic terror and sentimental sympathy in these early novels contributes a more sophisticated understanding of how Dickens positioned his fiction within literary discourses of the time. It also exemplifies an ethical criticism that is neither preemptively moralistic nor evasively allergic to discussions of ethical content but, rather, responsive to the particulars of ethical encounters in such a way as to make them conversant with our theorizing.

Ethics, of course, is a vexed category, invoked here in the broad sense of a description of how one relates to the other in both freedom and responsibility. Ethics in this sense

¹ On the ethical turn, see Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep* (1988); J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading* (1987); Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (1995); Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (1990); and Tobin Siebers, *The Ethics of Criticism* (1988). For a cautious appraisal of some of this thinking, see Bruce Henrickson, "'The Real Thing'" (1991).

is seemingly inescapable; Geoffrey Galt Harpham points out that even attempts to reject one ethical value (as, say, leading to violence) must do so by positing a superseding ethical value (avoiding violence) (17). We are hard-pressed to argue against ethics without in some way demonstrating a sense of responsibility to something, a commitment to which is itself an ethics.² In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor suggests that we cannot even conceive of the human *qua* person without some ethical framework that describes individual agency (27). After all, one can hardly propose a course of action to oneself or another without the presumption (regardless of metaphysical justification) that one is free to act or not, and one's very concept of oneself or another consists in large part of those freely chosen acts to which one bears witness. Ethics, whatever its content, structures human personhood itself; indeed, as Emmanuel Levinas claims, ethics is first the philosophy that forms the basis of all other knowledge. The encounter with the other breaks the unselfconscious ego out of its isolation in the state of nature and discovers it within the intersubjective relation. The need to respond emerges before the other, and this generates language and communication and the knowledge that becomes possible through it.³

With respect to Dickens, this ethical condition can be framed as "the whole question of whether goodness can survive in the Victorian world" (Dvorak 53). That is, the extent to which ethics concerns goodness or good actions—and our ability to perform them—entails both practical and metaphysical speculations about the world's hospitality to that goodness. Dickens's particular use of the Gothic and sentimental registers two affective-existential reactions to this ethical condition with respect to other persons—that is, "the world" defined intersubjectively. Specifically, he uses the Gothic to represent the ego's fear of otherness—either in the world or within one's own mind—and that this otherness will somehow consume or destroy the self; this is the anxiety that the world is inhospitable to goodness. Interestingly, the real threat to the self in *The Pickwick Papers* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* comes not from a foreign other but from the sudden "othering" of the familiar—the devil you know, or rather, the devil you didn't know you knew. He uses the sentimental, on the other hand, to affirm the hope that the other—always another person—is not only "safe" but a source of ethical agency in the world. Dickens's use of these genres, then, situates his work within the history of Western ethical thought beginning with the early modern autonomous ego and leading to recent postmodern ethics of the other.

Pickwick's Interpolated Gothic Tales

The many short, interpolated narratives in *The Pickwick Papers* often bear only a thin thematic relation to anything else in the book, but that can be easily accounted for by their participation in the Gothic and sentimental traditions of narrative disruption. Historically, these highly affective genres favored interpolation as a means of running

² I will not be getting into distinctions such as between "ethics" as this fundamental intersubjective condition and "morality" as any given articulation of the content of our responsibility. I mention it only to point out how even a commitment to an ideology can be ethical (or "moral") in this way but that the inescapability of ethics neither validates all ethical/moral systems nor precludes argument about them. We cannot escape ethics, but we can still act unethically.

³ This point combines Emmanuel Levinas's phenomenology of "living from" in *Totality and Infinity*, his account of the other's arrest of the ego's freedom in "Philosophy," and his rooting of sense in the orientation to the other in *Humanism of the Other*. I am offering a certain amount of interpretation in my use of the term "state of nature," a term Levinas does not use despite providing a narrative that seems very much in that tradition.

against the grain of the classical unity of action by suspending the main action for the sake of a subordinate, often didactic, action. In *Pickwick*, interpolation allows Dickens to depart momentarily from his comic plot to explore the kinds of effects he can achieve in other modes. Specifically, in "The Stroller's Tale" and "The Madman's Manuscript," Dickens creates Gothic scenes of guilt and madness to raise anxieties about the very basis of social life, anxieties that must somehow be contained in order to return to the levity of the main plot.

"The Stroller's Tale" actually belongs to a form of religiously inspired, sentimental death-bed narrative in which a wicked or wasteful person suffers at last for their sins in their final moments.⁴ Most of the tale takes this form of counter-example or a warning against bad living, as the dying circus clown bemoans his wanton lifestyle; but there is a brief Gothic moment of delusion and terror when he grabs the narrator (the stroller of the title) and begs not to be left alone with his wife, crying, "She'll murder me; I know she will" (PP 41). These mad ramblings prove to be the stings of a guilty conscience, as he confesses, "I beat her, Jem; I beat her yesterday, and many times before. I have starved her and the boy too; and now I am weak and helpless Jem, she'll murder me for it."

The clown does not simply confess to guilty feelings but fears that his own brutality will be turned against him as a just, if terrible, retribution. At the same time, whatever pity the reader may have felt for the man transforms into revulsion. Just at the point where the sentimental virtue of sympathy and the Christian virtue of forgiveness are most invoked and required, Dickens interrupts the reader's response by invoking personal and social repulsion of spousal violence. This is unsettling enough, but the content of the clown's outcry compounds the emotional response. He fears that the victim of his violence will return that violence upon him at the point of death—and *she will be right to do so*. Sentimental convention itself is at stake here, for if the clown is right, it raises the nightmarish possibility that goodness is little more than a delicate social agreement that, when tested by something truly evil, can quickly turn into its opposite.

At the same time, the more explicitly Gothic the scene becomes, the more this possibility is limited to the ravings of a guilty conscience and a mind removed from the common sphere of society. The clown clearly misinterprets his wife's faithful attendance as a kind of haunting: "Jem, she must be an evil spirit—a devil!" (PP 42). While this amplifies the Gothic qualities of the scene by evoking superstitions and the supernatural, it is also obviously a mere projection and not an apprehension of his wife's actual relation to him. The intimate devil is not his wife or society but in fact a force within himself, although it still has power to disrupt the responsiveness of the ethical relation. The stroller even reflects that he "could say nothing in reply; for who could offer hope, or consolation, to the object being before me?"

What hope they cannot offer in words the stroller and the clown's wife offer in pity and care, tending him until his final moment. While in principle this demonstrates the disproportion of ethical response to what the clown may actually deserve, Dickens offers none of the conventional comforts of the death-bed scene. He offers no consolations for the stroller or the wife, and the clown himself slips beyond the ability of their care to affect his conscious mind. The remainder of the tale diffuses any ethical excess into a terror that

⁴ See Margarete Holubetz for a catalog of typical Victorian representations of death.

is still ethical but is far more conventional—what we would call didactic. For another page and a half the clown writhes and despairs under feverish delusions and finally expires violently, a victim at last of his own cruelty. The tale abruptly and dramatically ends with the word “dead!” to emphasize the finality of the event (a significant detail when compared to Little Nell’s death [OCS]) (PP 44). For the abusive clown, there is no resolution and no redemption, nor any comfort for his wife, child, or friend—not even the comfort of their own comparative virtues, though it may be implied. Mr. Pickwick’s response—no doubt a sage one that would have given the narrator “the highest gratification” to record (45)—is forever deferred by the entrance of a waiter, a deferral serving a dual purpose that interrupts even conventional didacticism. On the one hand, while “The Stroller’s Tale” ultimately permits a conventionally moralistic reading—inspiring fear about living wickedly—it foregoes any explicit moralizing on the story, leaving the meaning of the clown’s death at least somewhat ambiguous. On the other hand, it returns us to the comic mode where the tale may be effectively forgotten.

“A Madman’s Manuscript” similarly invokes Gothic energies only to at last divert them into a conventional didacticism, but its form admits of even more ambivalence than “The Stroller’s Tale.” The narrative consists of a confession by a man who had hidden his madness from society well enough to inherit an ample property and marry; his life of leisure and debauchery drives his wife mad and to her death. The tale ends with a scientific postscript diagnosing the author. Superficially, the manuscript momentarily raises the fear, again, that civility is but a performance masking violence; but the madman’s imprisonment and the appended case history serve to mediate these fears with the assurance that such actors are eventually discovered, caught, and put away for the protection of society.

Read more critically, the manuscript suggests it is the reader, not the madman, who may be insane. With a Poe-like self-consciousness, the narrator finds in his madness a confidence that dupes others into believing him sane, boasting that “the law—the eagle-eyed law itself—had been deceived. . . . The madman’s cunning had over-reached them all” (PP 140). His self-awareness empowers him in its secrecy, with his potential violence hidden behind appearances. “I could have screamed with ecstasy,” he writes, “when I dined alone with some fine roaring fellow, to think how pale he would have turned, and how fast he would have run, if he had known that the dear friend who sat close to him, sharpening a bright glittering knife, was a madman with all the power, and half the will, to plunge it in his heart.” The question becomes whether it is more insane to believe in the sustainability of the social order or to face up to its pretenses and will one’s performance within it. The madman’s performance itself reveals civility as pretense, for if he can fool others, then others can fool us. Moreover, the narrator claims he is more present to himself in his madness than the reader in his or her soundness of mind. This is a problem for the pre-Freudian, Cartesian ego, which depends upon the coherence of the mind to itself. The madman turns self-presence on its head, rendering mad the naïve socialite who believes society is safely knowable.

The appended expert analysis sublimates this anti-rational possibility, displacing its anxieties onto causal explanations that reinstate the boundaries between sanity and madness. The unknown commentator attributes the madman’s “ravings” to “energies misdirected in early life, and excesses prolonged until their consequences could never be repaired” (PP 145). This view provides some explanation for the madman’s

consciousness, as well as for possible moralizing. This moralizing is only implicit, but it could be a rephrased version of “The Stroller’s Tale”: live well and save yourself from such madness. But this solution to the disturbances of the text depends upon the very ethics it calls into question. To ascribe the madman’s ravings merely to madness is to reinscribe the inscrutability of society as if it had never been called into question, yet precisely this *has* been called into question. The text itself resists this sublimation for the same reason that Poe’s stories are so unsettling: by situating the reader within the consciousness of the madman, Dickens creates a double perspective that simultaneously shrinks from the possible reality of this madness and takes aesthetic pleasure in imagining it. The possibility of enjoying this madness is proof enough that at least some part of our social lives is or can be performance, and that the Gothic possibility of a friend being a murderous madman is therefore real. “The Madman’s Manuscript” accommodates two kinds of devil: one’s friends and one’s own mind.

Still, the effects of such disturbances remain very local in *The Pickwick Papers*. Pickwick falls asleep fearfully, but the sun comes out again and all is well with the world. Harry Stone points out that Dickens already felt the limits of the interruptive structure of interpolation, since his “fundamental tendency was to combine the everyday with the fanciful, not to keep them apart” (80). To put it more forcefully and in terms of genre, Dickens saw the fantastic as *inhering* in the realistic—what he called keeping to the “romantic side of familiar things,” which is also to say that he understood realism differently than a number of his contemporaries (*Bleak House*, Preface 7). This process begins when Pickwick’s adventures develop narrative unity and the interpolated tales more or less disappear. Furthermore, sentimental response in these tales is merely implied and remains weak, merely conventional, whereas the theory of moral sentiment becomes important in Pickwick’s intervention on behalf of Alfred Jingle and Job Trotter.⁵ In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, despite its origins as a short story that ran long, Dickens eventually integrates the Gothic fear of otherness and develops a more direct, ethically complex sentimental response to it.

Little Nell in Peril

One might summarize *The Old Curiosity Shop* as the story of an innocent young girl who flees London with her gambling-addict grandfather, pursued by the spiteful, malicious dwarf, Daniel Quilp. The novel stages a confrontation between a sentimental protagonist and a grotesque Gothic villain. Like the interpolated tales, Dickens seems to focus much of the novel’s evil forces on a single character; indeed, the narrative continues his signature fairy-tale formulation of evil existing primarily in local, personal sources. Jane Smiley’s claim that “*The Old Curiosity Shop* defines an outer boundary of one of Dickens’s modes of imagining his world, and it is a world peopled by unrealistic, fairy-tale figures of ogres and princesses and fools” (30) is true enough in its way but perhaps an oversimplification. While Quilp represents the forces of evil, characters like Sampson Brass and Dick Swiveller exhibit more moral weakness than outright vice; in their relationships to Quilp and to one another, Dickens develops complex intersections of weak character and upbringing, avarice and poverty, and self-interest and conscience.

⁵ This event sits just on the margins of the scope of this paper, which concerns the sentimental as a response to the Gothic. Jingle and Trotter’s imprisonment is more thoroughly comic and sentimental, hardly Gothic at all.



Fig. 1. The Beautiful Child in Her Gentle Slumber

More important, Quilp's direct influence on Nell and her grandfather, old Trent, dissipates quite early in the novel. In Chapter the Twenty-seventh, Nell avoids confronting Quilp while over-hearing that he leaves on the next London coach. As she determines not to tell her grandfather, and as nothing else comes of it, there is no sustained effect on the narrative, only a brief mention, two chapters later, that "Quilp indeed was a perpetual nightmare to the child, who was constantly haunted by his ugly face and stunted figure" (*OCS* 288). After this, Quilp spends most of his energy scheming with Brass against Kit and Swiveller. He once leaves town, in pursuit of the strange gentleman and Kit's mother, who have a lead on Nell's whereabouts, but that expedition fails and so everyone returns home. Quilp's power in the novel is limited to London.

Once Nell and old Trent get out in the country, the real evil becomes apparent—not the grotesque dwarf but Nell's own grandfather and his gambling addiction. The farther Nell travels from the city into a pastoral countryside, the more spiritualized her experience becomes; Dickens has in fact prepared us for such a transition, although he may not have initially planned on the change in Quilp's role. One of the earliest images of Little Nell—literally, as it is also the first illustration—is of the angelic, sentimental child surrounded by the Gothic trappings of the curiosity shop, notably pieces of armor and statues (Fig. 1). Master Humphrey, the narrator of the first few numbers, who meets Nell in the street and accompanies her home, pictures to himself later "the old dark murky rooms—the gaunt suits of mail with their ghostly silent air—the faces all awry, grinning from wood and stone—the dust and rust, and worm that lives in wood—and alone in the midst of all the lumber and decay, and ugly age, the beautiful child in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams" (*OCS* 56). Humphrey makes the contrast explicit: "I had her image, without any effort of imagination, surrounded and beset by everything that was foreign to its nature, and furthest removed from the sympathies of her sex and age." The whole structure of the book is from the first an allegorical confrontation between beauty

and chaos, purity and filth, wholeness and decay, youthful innocence and adult fallenness.

As this allegorical plot supersedes the original villain plot, the forces that threaten Nell become correspondingly more allegorical—meaning more concerned with the ethical-metaphysical question of the survival of Nell's brand of purity and goodness in the real world. Dickens premises our sentimental responsiveness to Nell in large part on her responsiveness to others, especially her grandfather. He then deploys Gothic techniques to put precisely that responsiveness in question. As Quilp's presence recedes from the country, the evil he embodies does not become abstract but shifts into a body with far more ethical ambiguity: that of Nell's grandfather. The conflict then shifts from one between persons in an antagonistic relationship to one within an affectionate relationship; this, significantly, is where the novel's Gothic character takes on its fullest ethical charge and its sentimentalism faces its greatest challenge.

To get to this point, Dickens has to transfer the locus of anxiety from Quilp to the grandfather. After the scene in which Quilp just misses Nell in the street, Dickens creates a similar contrast of peaceful innocence with grotesque faces. Nell and her grandfather have moved to Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks, where they have found jobs and, until Quilp's appearance, had felt safe:

She slept, for their better security, in the room where the wax-work figures were, and she never retired to this place at night but she tortured herself—she could not help it—with imagining a resemblance, in some one or other of their death-like faces, to the dwarf, and this fancy would sometimes so gain upon her that she would almost believe that he had removed the figure and stood within the clothes. Then there were so many of them with their great glassy eyes—and, as they stood one behind the other all about her bed, they looked so like living creatures, and yet so unlike in their grim stillness and silence, that she had a kind of terror of them for their own sakes. (*OCS* 288-89)

Her comfort among her grandfather's curiosities is dispelled by the wax figures' likeness and unlikeness to humans, true also of Quilp. But the passage moves from fear of Quilp to fear of the wax-works themselves; indeed, Quilp's power over Nell's fate ends within this paragraph. Although he continues searching for them, he only manages to exert influence over other characters. His most powerful act, after taking over the shop, comes much later, when he frames Kit for theft.

Perhaps Dickens regarded Quilp as too concrete an evil force to serve his purposes. As is often remarked, the farther Nell and her grandfather remove from their life in London, the less specific and more fairy-tale-like their environment becomes. Quilp becomes too limited in comparison with the strange pull death and decay take on for Nell, such as the way she becomes fascinated with graveyards:

Hard by these gravestones of dead years, and forming a part of the ruin . . . were two small dwellings with sunken windows and oaken doors, fast hastening to decay, empty and desolate. . . Upon these tenements, the attention of the child became exclusively riveted. (*OCS* 440)

Quilp represents only one aspect or feature of a greater threat to Nell—that of death itself. Hence Dickens sends Quilp back to London where he can still do some kind of harm, but to someone else.

The real threat is not so much more abstract as it is more diffuse or pervasive than even a demonic villain like Quilp could offer on his own; it is in the Gothic decay and ruin of the house Nell and her grandfather at last inhabit, in the graves, by and in the church, where Nell likes to sit. But it is also nearer to home, in the heart of Nell's grandfather. His obsession with gambling, which led to their financial troubles and later drives him to theft, ultimately replaces Quilp in Nell's mind as the danger from which they must run—but of course she cannot escape a quality, an addiction, especially when it lies in a person she will not abandon. Here, then, Dickens shifts the terms of the conflict between good and evil in a way that fruitfully complicates them. Nell's grandfather is clearly good insofar as he loves Nell but clearly wicked insofar as he gambles away all their money. And yet the evil in him takes the form of a perversion of his love for her—he gambles in the hopes of winning their way out of poverty. Thus does the same love that recommends him to our moral judgment render him a thoroughly dangerous character.

After Nell and her grandfather leave Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks, her grandfather again takes up gambling. In a waking-nightmare scene, a phantom haunts Nell in her room:

A figure was there . . . and there, between the foot of the bed and the dark casement, it crouched and slunk along, groping its way with noiseless hands, and stealing round the bed. She had no voice to cry for help, no power to move, but lay still, watching it. On it came—on, silently and stealthily, to the bed's head. The breath so near her pillow that she shrunk back into it, lest those wandering hands should light upon her face. Back again it stole to the window—then turned its head towards her. The dark form was a mere blot upon the lighter darkness of the room, but she saw the turning of the head, and felt and knew how the eyes looked and the ears listened. (*OCS* 301)

Whereas Quilp's threat was mitigated by human limitations, this phantom figure moves with intention but without personality; it steals the few coins she has in her dress pocket and crawls out of the room. Nell goes to her grandfather's room, only to notice, to her horror, that very figure creeping in before her. Peeking in, she sees "the old man himself, the only living creature there, his white face pinched and sharpened by the greediness which made his eyes unnaturally bright, counting the money of which his hands had robbed her" (302). This stunning revelation ends the chapter and that week's number. What makes it stunning of course is that this "dark form" paralyzing Nell with fear, this featureless phantom stealing the precious pennies on which their survival depends—is not Quilp or any number of other unscrupulous characters but the most important person in her world. The Gothic significance of the scene is explicit: the terror "she had lately felt" from Quilp or her nightmares at the waxworks "was nothing compared with that which now oppressed her" (303). The evil acts of one near to her exceed in degree and significance anything a stranger could do.

The evidence of her grandfather's deceit contrasts so sharply with Nell's conception of him that she is forced to dissociate the two:

[she] had no fear of the dear old grandfather, . . . but the man she had seen that night . . . counting the money by the glimmering light, seemed like another creature in his shape, a monstrous distortion of his image, a something to recoil from, and be the more afraid of,

because it bore a likeness to him. . . . She could scarcely connect her own affectionate companion, save by his loss, with this old man, so like yet so unlike him. (*OCS* 303)

The problem with this dual personality is that neither component can be isolated from the other, both sharing a source that is “like yet so unlike.” For Nell, this evokes the disturbing ambiguity of Mrs. Jarley’s Waxworks, which “looked so like living creatures, and yet so unlike in their grim stillness and silence, that she had a kind of terror of them” (289). José Ortega y Gasset describes waxworks as “melodrama at its purest” because they collapse the distance necessary for aesthetic response; normal categories break down, and “we do not know whether to ‘live’ the things or to observe them” (37). With waxworks, one is effectually manipulated into a relation that is *like yet so unlike* an ethical relation; similarly, Nell’s grandfather is frightening because the normal categories break down, he is *like yet so unlike* himself, a “monstrous distortion.” Ethically speaking, what makes the monster monstrous—what makes one’s grandfather monstrous—manifests when the “dark form” stands by the window and Nell “felt and knew how the eyes looked and the ears listened” (*OCS* 301). To feel and know in such a situation requires deduction and projection upon the otherwise blank form; it does not reflect actual experience of or response to the other. What is frightening is not having access to this fundamental responsiveness. In Levinas’s terms, the monster is monstrous because it *has no face*; “face” names the way in which the other stands before me and addresses me as an ethical being by revealing to me something that truly transcends the ego—the other him- or herself.⁶ The monster certainly stands before one as something transcendent and challenges the omnipotence of the ego, but it does not do so as an ethical being. One does not experience ethical responsiveness but, instead, threat.

If a wax figure is uncanny because a thing looks too much like a person, Nell’s grandfather becomes a Gothic terror because a person looks too much like a thing. There is an absence or confounding of ethical responsibility; there is no (ethical) expression to the face. This is obviously a problem when the monster is still physically and ontologically human. But ethical response does not depend in each instance upon encountering the face of the other. After all, Nell has a relationship with her grandfather, and so the old man’s fundamental personhood maintains its grasp on her heart in this absence of expression. Memory, history, and affection carry Nell through her fears and nourish her spirit as she assumes moral responsibility for her grandfather. She resolves the problem of ethical absence quickly, when she sees the old man sleeping and recognizes the grandfather she loves. “She had no fear, but she had a deep and weighty sorrow, and it found its relief in tears”:

“God bless him!” said the child, stooping softly to kiss his placid cheek. “I see too well now, that they would indeed part us if they found us out, and shut him up from the light of the sun and sky. He has only me to help him. God bless us both!” (*OCS* 304)

Nell has a simple but adequate understanding of the perverse circumstances she is in, at least with respect to how it would appear to someone outside of her relationship with her grandfather. And there is something of an ethical achievement here. She had already been companion, servant, and guide to her grandfather, but now she becomes invested in his personhood. The childish, sentimental terms in which she thinks may obscure its

⁶ See, for example, Levinas’s account of the face in “Philosophy” (108ff).

ethical qualities, as she might just as easily be speaking of a stray dog. But only moments later she demonstrates a more sophisticated awareness of the ethical stakes by inventing a fiction (that someone took the money only in jest) that might permit her grandfather to return her money without admitting to his shameful action. Later, overhearing his resolution to steal from Mrs. Jarley, she crafts another story in order to save him—this time a nightmare vision from which she insists they must escape to some other place. In each case a commitment to her grandfather’s moral character takes precedence over the exigencies of her own reality.

These fictions create a multi-layered pathos in Little Nell’s circumstances. In an attempt to redeem the moral evil of stealing from her, she offers her grandfather a lie. In order to protect him from committing a crime, she creates another lie. She feels compelled to create these lies by her premature entry into an adulthood where she must care for the person who should still be caring for her. And yet, in developing these little dramas, she demonstrates an at least intuited ethical maturity that takes responsibility for her grandfather’s character. She provides him an opportunity to be upright even at the expense of truth. However, her last extremity—flight—is doomed to failure and an almost ritual repetition, since it will only be a matter of time before he will be tempted to gamble or steal, requiring that she rescue him again. Thus Nell is caught between a childlike dependency on one who loves her and a maturity wherein she is called upon to love beyond her experience, trying to negotiate a world from which she can never escape. Meanwhile, the strange gentleman is back in London trying to track them—in fact, he had just traced them to Mrs. Jarley’s when they fled again—and so their mutual rescue becomes conceivable just as they are compelled to run beyond the reach of their friends again. Nell is not alone in the world, but the people she meets on her way cannot save her, and the people who might save her cannot reach her. Nor is she alone a worthy person, but she alone maintains a childish innocence about the world, seemingly untouched by selfish impulses despite her suffering.

While these ethically and emotionally fraught scenes demonstrate an interplay of both sympathy and responsibility, it would not be quite correct to suggest that Nell learns something about ethical life or represents some profound ethical insight; her innocent and virtuous character feels and acts instinctively in any situation. Dickens makes an explicit connection between the Gothic fear of the other and the sentimental hope for the other at the structural, not character, level. That is, he deploys a sentimental response of sympathy as the remedy for Gothic anxiety about the threat of the other, a response that affirms a care for the other and a faith in some moral bridge between self and other. Such spiritual abstraction is here necessitated by Nell’s role as the Victorian symbol of childhood innocence;⁷ ultimately, her quest is not ethical but allegorical: finding some home for goodness. The ethical drama inheres as an abstraction in the structural confrontation between the Gothic and the sentimental.

Because of this separation between structure and character, Dickens could not quite see his way out of the struggle he had established between sentimental purity and Gothic threat in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Instead, the book shifts gears and becomes a race against time as a mysterious benefactor tries to track them down, while Nell runs herself

⁷ On Nell as fairy-tale child and princess, see Harry Stone, 108ff. For a brief, though well-researched discussion of “the Romantic myth of the innocent child,” see Michael Peled Ginsburg, 91ff and 93n.11.

ragged guiding her grandfather to safety in a remote rural village. They fall in with an old schoolmaster friend and find a new livelihood looking after the village church, but there is little left for Nell to do in the narrative than, frankly, to leave the world. Dickens's friend and biographer John Forster deserves some credit for suggesting that "the gentle pure little figure and form should never change to the fancy" (151). This is telling because it indicates the extent to which Nell had become an abstraction, an early-Victorian pastoral myth. By the novel's end, we cease to imagine a practical solution to Nell's problems, even as the solitary gentleman, who turns out to be Nell's uncle, draws closer. If it were only that her uncle found her too late, we might say Dickens was rewriting *Oliver Twist* to emphasize that the wealthy benefactor sometimes fails to save the innocent child—and, indeed, this does make up one part of the novel's conclusion. Yet, what kills Nell is not that they cannot find a stable and feasible lifestyle, but that she is running from an evil she carries with her. It is not just that there are wicked, monstrous people or that the world is a dark, haunted place, but that the darkness is near at hand and haunts whatever comfortable world one might establish. Nell dies because the innocence with which she began the novel cannot persist into adulthood. As John Kucich argues, there are so many forces aligned against the child precisely in her innocence that "[i]t is impossible to conceive of an unthreatened Nell" (63).

If an unthreatened Nell is unimaginable, the same is true of an adult, sexually-mature Nell. The brunt of her character's narrative and emotional function consists in being an innocent—that is, in attracting readers' desire for goodness insofar as that is culturally associated with a state of childishness. Her death marks a passing of such associations. Nell, the focus of sentimental hope in the purity of childhood, succumbs to the internal and unsustainable pressures of her role as much as she is worn down by the external. All Dickens's later sentimental women will be more worldly, more connected to people, places, and things. What kills Nell is not the social problem of finding work and food but that her variety of sentimentalism had become, in effect, too spiritualized, too ethereal to perform or invite ethical response. J. Hillis Miller claims that *The Pickwick Papers* ends with "a farewell to the 18th century [novel]" (*Charles Dickens* 35); but, while that may be true respecting narrative form, the deaths of both Nell and her grandfather represent Dickens's farewell to eighteenth-century genres. What readers mourned when Nell died was not the loss of a beloved character but the loss of a cherished socially-defining myth.

We find, then, two movements in Dickens's early novels respecting eighteenth-century genres. First, his initial interest in them depends upon the ethical dimension they open within the horizons of (comic) realism. Gothic and sentimental effects work in tandem for Dickens to stress the fraught but crucial ethical field of intersubjectivity, our relations of responsibility to one another. Second, he gradually shifts these effects from local phenomena within narratives that formally interrupt the main, realistic narrative to structural elements of that realistic narrative itself. The Gothic properly inheres in the everyday of Little Nell's world precisely through the figure of her grandfather, her dear and intimate companion. In his later fiction, beginning seriously in *Dombey and Son*, Dickens tries to develop a more mature, realistic sentimentalism that can truly meet the challenge of the Gothic reality of the intimate other.

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DICKENS AND EMOTIONS

BY SHU FANG LAI

"Ah me! I thought those were high and great emotions."— *Great Expectations*

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Mr. Lorry tactfully "consults" Doctor Manette's opinion about the doctor's own case, "the case of an old and a prolonged shock, of great acuteness and severity to the affections, the feelings, the—the—as you express it—the mind" (229). Such reflections about affections, feelings or emotions¹ reveals Dickens's interest in the mystery of the mind and invites critical inspection of his fictional representations of strong and complex feelings, especially when manifested physically. For example, Brian Rosenberg has explored Dickens's representation of fragmented or divided personalities in *Little Dorrit*. Yet Rosenberg also notes that there is much disagreement among critics about whether scientific and other studies of the mind are evident in Dickens's characterizations, because "the lines between literary analyses of character and those of other disciplines were in the nineteenth century especially unclear" (95). The topic is thought-provoking.

Modern scholars have paid sustained attention to Dickens's fictional expressions of emotions in relation to other fields, including his responses to theatricality, psychology, and cultural inclusiveness (Karen Chase's *Eros and Psyche*) and the corporeality of his characterizations in relation to personalities (Juliet McMaster's *Dickens the Designer*). McMaster maintains that Dickens was knowledgeable about physiognomy and phrenology, seen in his allusion to the Swiss physiognomist, John Kaspar Lavater, in the detective story "Hunted Down." The narrator, Mr. Sampson, who works in a life-insurance office, judges his clients' trustworthiness based on their appearance: "I took his face to pieces in my mind, like a watch, and examined it in detail"; physiognomic observations are "the clue to the whole mystery" because "[a] very little key will open a very heavy door" ("Hunted" 399). Other studies of the relation of outward appearances (especially facial) to characters' inward essence include Michael Hollington's survey of "physiognomics" in *Oliver Twist* (including Cruikshank's illustrations), *Barnaby Rudge*, and *Hard Times*.² True, Dickens is seen to play up such knowledge self-consciously: "Some phrenologists affirm," remarks the narrator in *Sketches by Boz*, "that the agitation of a man's brain by different passions, produces corresponding developments in the form of his skull," yet he also warns against "pushing our theory" too far (60). Dr. John Elliotson, Dickens's close friend and family doctor, whose *Human Physiology* Dickens owned, is another confirmed influence; he often refers to Elliotson directly in his writings, though with reservations: "I hold phrenology, within certain limits, to be true" ("A Little Dinner" 109).³ But, revealing as they are,

¹ Victorians employed the terms emotion, affection, feeling, passion, sentiment, and sensibility with little distinction. "Emotion" is used in scientific studies in relation to "internal motion or agitation of the mind." See also Johnson-Laird and Oatley, Josephine Miles, and Alexander Bain.

² See Hollington's articles in *Dickens Quarterly*: "Monstrous Faces: Physiognomy in *Barnaby Rudge*" (8: 1991): 6-15; "Dickens and Cruikshank as Physiognomers in *Oliver Twist*" (7: 1990): 243-54; "Physiognomy in *Hard Times*" (9: 1992): 58-66; and "The Live Hieroglyphic: Physiologie and Physiognomy in *Martin Chuzzlewit*" (10: 1993) 57-67.

³ See Collins, Philip. "When Morals Lay in Lumps": *The Victorians and Phrenology*. Listener XC, no. 23 16 (1973): 213-15.

Lavater's physiognomy and Elliotson's phrenology are not the only intellectual bases for Dickens's recognition of physical appearances linked to characteristics and emotions. For example, Barbara Hardy foregrounds Dickens's theatrical and "behaviouristic rendering" of passions (45), while Juliet John examines his villains from the viewpoint of popular melodramatic art. John argues that Dickens "renders 'private' emotional experience using melodrama's impulse towards externalization, within a narrative context" (96), often through exaggerating the interiority of intense passions. Notwithstanding recent critical interest in Dickens's sentimentality, there is still a need critically and historically to analyze his depictions of feelings and emotions. The following epistemological enquiry studies cultural sources of emotions yet to be taken into account: the artist Le Brun and the scientist Sir Charles Bell, whose works Dickens knew well, along with Charles Darwin's response to Bell's work. While Darwin's evolutionary ideas are clearly part of Dickens's intellectual background, "One does not usually think of Dickens in relation to science at all, and I do not want to claim that it importantly influenced him" (Levine 3). But Levine has also persuasively advocated and demonstrated how "valuable" it is to see Dickens in the context of contemporary science, a connection that can be articulated in the way that their ideas "parallel," "juxtapose," and "coincide" with each other. Although Dickens would not have read Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (published 1872), evidence suggests that he was influenced by Darwin's earlier studies and by those of other naturalists (especially when reviewed or mentioned in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*). The trajectories of science and literature are strikingly comparable, as the following discussion reveals.

Charles Le Brun and the Design of Passions

Artist Charles Le Brun followed the Platonic tradition of assuming the human countenance to reflect the motion of the mind. Mainly concerned with the relation between mind and body, Le Brun adopted Descartes's categorization of six primitive passions in *Les passions de l'âme* (1649) to explain how the movements of eyebrows reflect various passions. Le Brun's book "Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière" (1698), translated into English as *A Method to Learn to Design the Passions* in 1734, influenced a number of British artists, including William Hogarth (McKenzie vii-viii). Because his account of each emotion is accompanied by at least one or more facial illustrations, it became a popular guide for artists during the next two decades (Fig. 1).

Dickens refers directly to Le Brun in *Little Dorrit*, describing William Dorrit's "pre-occupied face": "Le Brun . . . had made that English traveller the subject of a special

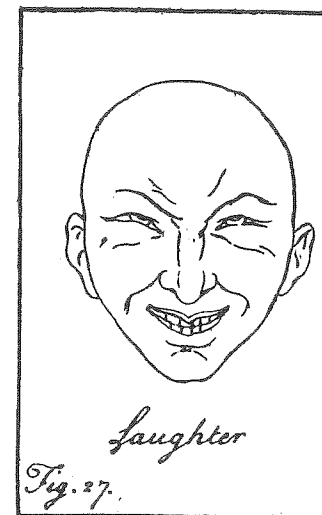


Fig. 1
Laughter (Le Brun, Method)

physiognomical treatise" (695). Other references linking physiognomy with character include Arthur Clennam's response to meeting Pancks: "many people select their models, much as the painters . . . select theirs [and] in the Royal Academy some evil old ruffian of a Dog-stealer will annually be found embodying all the cardinal virtues, on account of his eyelashes, or his chin, or his legs (thereby planting thorns of confusion in the breasts of the more observant students of nature)" (190-91). Further, Mr. Casby's blue eyes and countenance "seemed to be delivering sentiments of rare virtue . . . his physiognomical expression seemed to teem with benignity" (188). Although it is uncertain to what extent Dickens was influenced by Le Brun's treatise, there exists an established tradition of the outward form reflecting the inner character; nevertheless, the example suggests a possible debt elsewhere in his fiction.

The first issue to infer from this link relates to one of the most significant facial features, the eyebrows. In Le Brun's paradigm of the facial expressions of emotions, eyebrows are considered the most relevant feature (Fig. 2). Le Brun believes that "the middle of the brain is the place where the soul receives the images of the Passions; so the Eye-brow is the only Part of the whole face, where the Passions best make themselves known"; indeed, the eyebrows are "commonly of no other use than to follow the Emotions of the Heart" (*Method* 20-21). The two most expressive facial features manifest passions through two movements: rising and falling, thus displaying simple or compound emotions. Le Brun's theory was well-received and influential on artists and, plausibly, on Dickens.⁴

Dickens invites readers to link characters' inner qualities with their outward appearances. For example, Jane Murdstone's "very heavy eyebrows, nearly meeting over her large nose, as if, being disabled by the wrongs of her sex from wearing whiskers" (*DC* 97) indicate the hardness, severity, and narrowness of her stern nature. Mr. Jaggers's "bushy black eyebrows that wouldn't lie down, but stood up bristling" (*GE* 68) correspond to his professional manner, which is burly and abrupt. Mr. Matthew Bagnet has "shaggy eyebrows and whiskers like the fibres of a coco-nut, [but] not a hair upon his head," indicating the "extreme hardness and the toughness of his physiognomy" (*BH* 441, 531).

Another important point associated with Le Brun is facial proportion. In *A Series of Lithographic Drawings*, he contrasts Antonius's "well spaced eyes, broad and elevated forehead, a straight and slightly aquiline nose" with Nero's "heavy jaw and a low forehead" (qtd. Kelly 13). Disproportionate or ill-proportioned facial features, unusually sized or shaped facial features (a projecting jaw, a low forehead, a nose too large or too small) may signify unusual, evil, or even criminal characters. Dickens often makes use of a similar device to enrich his characterizations, like the "Artful Dodger," a "snub-nosed, flat-

⁴ Joseph Spence wrote: "If you would rather have Authorities from the writers of honest Prose, Le Brun (who published a very pretty Treatise, to shew how the Passions affect the Face and Features) says that the principle Seat of them is in the Eyebrows" (qtd. McKenzie vii).

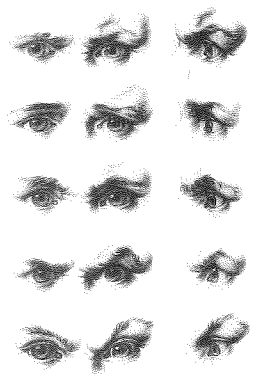


Fig. 2
Eyebrows (Le Brun / Montague)

browed" pickpocket (*OT* 100); Wackford Squeers, the brutal and ignorant boarding school proprietor with "a low, protruding forehead" (*NW* 90); and Ned Dennis, the hangman with "a low, retreating forehead . . . and eyes so small and near together" (*BR* 353). Other examples include Fagin, Thomas Gradgrind, Uriah Heep, and Edward Murdstone (Kelly 62). Physiognomic awareness is especially evident in his autobiographical hero Pip, who is sensitive to appearances and first impressions. For example, his brother-in-law Joe has "curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue," and his sister is "tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron" (*GE* 12-13). Pip associates Miss Havisham, who "had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes," with a ghostly waxwork, a dark-eyed skeleton (50); Mr. Wemmick's "square wooden face . . . dimples . . . glittering eyes—small, keen and black—and thin wide mottled lips . . . seemed to have been imperfectly chipped out with a dull-edged chisel" (135). Such descriptions make strong impressions, a technique of "externalization" attributed both to theatrical influences (John 28) and fine art.

But, as Dickens was aware, there are limitations to Le Brun's prototypes. In *Bleak House*, a ruined Chancery suitor, Gridley, is described as "a tall sallow man, with a careworn head, on which but little hair remained, a deeply lined face, and prominent eyes"; he "had a combative look; and a chafing, irritable manner" (*BH* 261). His irascibility is rendered through his way of talking, through "[the] manner in which his face worked, and the violent gestures" (267); yet, although rude in appearance and tetchy in manner, he is fairly kind to the three destitute orphaned children in his lodging-house. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Jenny Wren sarcastically comments on the Lady models of her dolls: "When they go bobbing into the hall from the carriage, and catch a glimpse of my little physiognomy . . . I dare say they think I am wondering and admiring with all my eyes and heart, but they little think they're only working for my dolls!" (496). Symbolically, the dolls anticipate more complex characterizations in Dickens's later novels, based more on mature observation and experience than simple physiognomic principles. Indeed, facial appearances can be misleading and emotions skilfully suppressed.

Later characterizations depend more on physical movements and actions than on fixed facial prototypes, seen, for example, in Dickens's description of Pancks:

jet black beads of eyes; a scrubby little black chin; wiry black hair striking out from his head in prongs, like forks or hair-pins; and a complexion that was very dingy by nature, or very dirty by art, or a compound of nature and art. He had dirty hands and dirty broken nails, and looked as if he had been in the coals; he was in a perspiration, and snorted and sniffed and puffed and blew, like a little labouring steam-engine. (*LD* 190)

Panck's physical features are exacerbated by his physical agitation, a technique also used in *Great Expectations*. Magwitch condemns Compeyson's "groveling and wandering" eyes: "He lies! . . . Look at his face; ain't it written there?" (*GE* 34). Drummle's "sluggish complexion of his face" and his "large awkward tongue that seemed to loll about" reflects his "idle, proud, niggardly, reserved, and suspicious" nature (158); when Pip meets Drummle, his "great-jowled face . . . cut me to the heart" (266). While Mr. Sampson ("Hunted Down") judges according to physiognomic theory, that fails to work for Mrs. Wilfer, a self-proclaimed "disciple of Lavater" (*OMF* 356) who misjudges Mrs. Boffin:

“the craft, the secrecy, the dark deep underhanded plotting, written in Mrs. Boffin’s countenance, make me shudder” (159). In Dickens’s later novels, evil and ugliness do not invariably coexist, nor do the good and the beautiful; Joe and Bidy in *Great Expectations* are plain-looking good people, whereas Estella is stunningly beautiful but mentally warped, implying Dickens’s understanding that simple “physiognomics” is inadequate to reveal characters’ inner qualities.⁵

Sir Charles Bell and the Science of Emotions

It is generally acknowledged that Sir Charles Bell, Professor of Surgery at Edinburgh and leading scientific authority on the nervous system, was influenced by Le Brun, adopting his method of designing different plates to indicate individual passions (Figs. 3 & 4). As Jennifer Montague notes, “it would be wrong . . . to see the artists and the physiologists . . . as belonging to two divided cultures,” because both Bell and Darwin “looked carefully at works of art” (101). Bell references paintings as well as eyebrow theory, agreeing with Le Brun’s assertion that mid-brow is where the “[s]oul receives the images of the Passions . . . the Eye-brow is the only Part of the whole face, where the passions best make themselves known” (20-21). But distinct from Le Brun, Bell studied the movement of facial muscles scientifically, emphasizing the internal structure enabling movement of the eyebrows; the *corrugator supercillii* muscle (Fig. 5) knits the eyebrow with an enigmatic effect that unaccountably but irresistibly conveys the idea of mind (93).⁶ Interestingly, the scientist



Fig. 3 Laughing (Bell)

Bell attributes this mechanism to the Creator and his care for human beings; Darwin, who studied Bell’s work, disagreed fundamentally with his natural theology, arguing that emotional expression is simply the result of evolution. Although Bell “does not try to explain why different muscles are brought into action under different emotions” (Montagu 9), and his theory is far from perfect, he was considered a major scientific authority on the expression of emotions during Dickens’s lifetime.⁷

Sometimes, even negative emotions such as anger, rage, hatred, and scorn can be appealing, as in the example of John Jasper (*Mystery of Edwin Drood*) who is obsessed with Rosa: “How beautiful you are! You are more beautiful in anger than in repose. I don’t

⁵ See “Musical Physiognomy.” *All the Year Round*, 2 Jan. 1864, 10: 444-48, which applies Lavater’s theory to musicians, claiming their temperaments are reflected by the instruments they choose to play.

⁶ More overt physical actions also indicate emotionalism: female characters throw their aprons over their heads in distress, and male characters pursue courtship with “action of hands”—for example, Affery Flintwinch (*LD*), Eddy Twinkleton (*MED*), John Jasper (*MED*), and Bradley Headstone (*OMF*).

⁷ About their relationship, see *Pilgrim Letters* (2:314-15, 4:669); and references to Bell’s works in *Household Words*: “Why Shave?” (7:561) and “Nerves” (15:522-25).

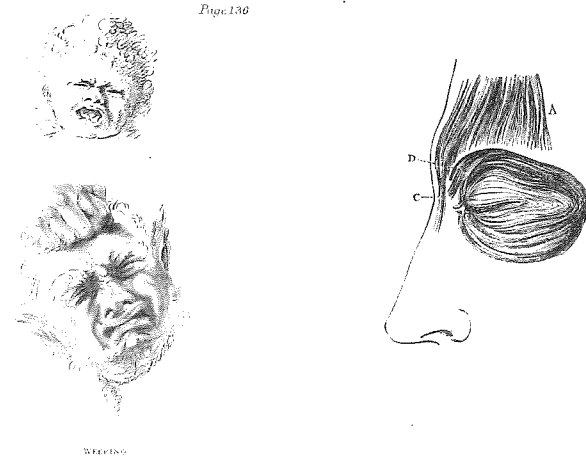


Fig. 4 Weeping (Bell)

Fig. 5 Eyebrow Muscles (Bell)

ask you for your love; give me yourself and your hatred; give me yourself and that pretty rage; give me yourself and that enchanting scorn; it will be enough for me” (*MED* 229). *Bleak House* offers the most telling evidence linking anatomy with character through Hortense (Lady Dedlock’s French maid and the murderess of Tulkington), whose “convivial manner” contrasts with her “tightness of face, thin elongation of compressed lips, and sidewise look”; she is “a large-eyed brown woman with black hair; who would be handsome, but for a certain feline mouth . . . jaws too eager . . . skull too prominent. There is something indefinably keen and wan about her *anatomy*; and she has a watchful way of looking out of the corners of her eyes without turning her head” (*BH* 209; emphasis added).

Charles Darwin: Human-Beast Analogy

In the context of this discussion, a related issue requiring investigation is the human-beast analogy. Although basing his work on Le Brun, Bell criticizes the idea that “features indicate the disposition by resembling those of animals,” calling it “an unjust and dangerous theory” (133); while Bell objected to Le Brun’s human-beast sketches (Fig. 6), Darwin proposed alternative explanations for the resemblance between humans and beasts (Fig. 7).

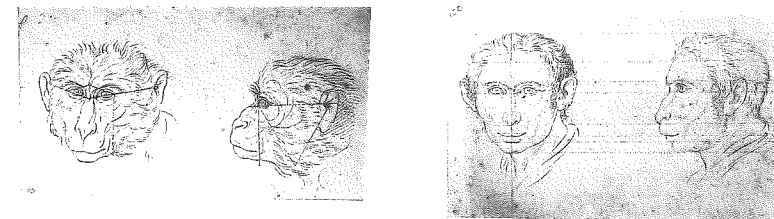


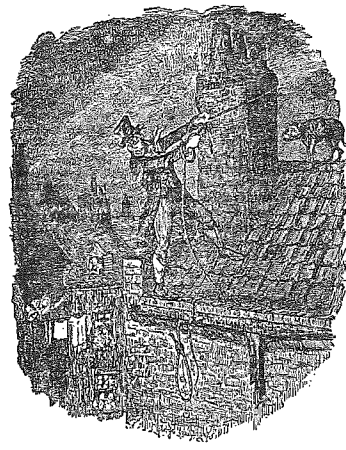
Fig. 6 Human-beast (Le Brun / Montague)

Dickens's treatment of emotional expressions, such as his early human-beast analogies, parallels Darwin's thinking; Darwin himself was once struck by Dickens's use of animal imagery in describing human rage. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin refers to Dickens's "The Pursuit and Escape" in *Oliver Twist* (Darwin 241). In this climactic episode, the murderer Bill Sikes is surrounded by a furious mob, "jumping up one behind another, snarling with their teeth, and making at him like wild beasts" (OT 445). Fagin warned Nancy that Sikes is "a brute-beast" (401); himself a condemned criminal, Fagin's countenance was "more like that of a snared beast than the face of a man" (472). Sikes's dog "grasp[s] the end of the poker between his teeth . . . biting at it like a wild beast" (153); Cruikshank's two illustrations of Sikes with his dog underline the man-and-beast convergence (Figs. 8 & 9). In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Quilp's grotesque face with its "ghastly smile . . . constantly revealed the few discoloured fangs that were yet scattered in his mouth, and gave him the aspect of a panting dog" (65); the analogy is well-captured in Phiz's illustration of Quilp popping his head out the tavern-window, the words "Man and Beast" on the side (Fig. 10).⁸ Memorable human-beast characters crowd the Dickensian gallery, prompting George Orwell's observation that the public "would recognize Dickensian characters from books they had never read" (Trezise 167; Cordery 19).⁹ Dickens's later characterizations



Sikes attempting to destroy his Dog

Fig. 8 Sikes and his dog (Cruikshank)



The Last Chance

Fig. 9 Sikes and his dog (Cruikshank)

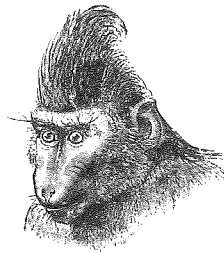


Fig. 10.—"Simpliciorum aeger" in a placid condition. Taken from life by Mr. Wolf.



Fig. 11.—The same, when pleased by being caressed.

Fig. 7 Darwin (*Expression*)

⁸ I appreciate Professor Malcolm Andrews for suggesting this example.

⁹ See also Hugh (BR 217); Poll Sweedlepipe (MC 486); Bagstock's "lobster eyes" (DS 146, 934); and Carker (DS 239).



Fig. 10 Man and Beast (Phiz)

emphasize not only beastly dispositions but animalistic actions: watching Magwitch's "sharp sudden bites" while eating, Pip recognizes the similarity between "the dog's way of eating and the man's" (GE 21); Phil Squod says of Joshua Smallweed: "he's a leech in his dispositions, he's a screw and a wice in his actions, a snake in his twistings, and a lobster in his claws" (BH 529). Bell's objection to Le Brun's animal-human characterization maintains that "laughter" and "weeping" are "the most extreme expression of the passions": they are "particularly human, arising from sentiments not participated [in] by the brutes" (134). To Darwin, humans and beasts are simply different species, linked in the remotest time and space. Modern readers are often tempted to speculate about Dickens's possible position regarding this debate. Darwin, who began studying emotion in the 1830s, was probably influenced by French naturalist, socialist, and journalist Alphonse Toussenel, whose *L'Esprit des Bêtes* was reviewed by Edmond Samuel Dixon in *Household Words* shortly after the book's English translation (1852). Also reviewed in *All the Year Round*, Toussenel's book addresses both "the universal principle of motion and of life"—a power "all created beings rejoice to yield to"—and passion, "the principle of universal motion . . . the eternal form of utterance by means of which the Deity reveals his law and his will to all his creatures" (7:564). In his "Passional Zoology" or "Zoological Metaphysics," as the reviewer calls it, Toussenel "illustrates man by the aid of brutes, quite as much as he explains brutes by the aid of man." Another *All the Year Round* review, "Vatican Ornithology" by Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald, summarizes Toussenel's theory of "Passional Analogy," praising it as "the science of sciences. . . . Every beast and every bird is the emblem of some manifestation of human passion" (3:65); man is, therefore, "not so widely separated from the brutes as he may fancy himself to be"—like the snipe, for example, a bird whose "manners and customs . . . personify the spirit of contradiction and of resistance to progress."

During the Victorian period, studies of the mind gradually gave way to evolutionary ideas and wider psychological findings, shifting from Le Brun's preoccupation with emotions and their physical expression toward the scientific-empiricism of Bell and Darwin. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin takes issue with Le Brun's claims, terming them "a specimen of the surprising nonsense which has been written on the subject" (12). Charles Bell, like Darwin, considers facial expression a means of communication; he finds that some expressive movements depend on involuntary changes in the respiratory organs and proposes three principles of expression that Darwin examines in his book. The major difference between Bell's and Darwin's theories lies in their alternative interpretations of the possible functions of emotional expression: to Bell, the physiology and anatomy of emotional expression are inherent and constitutional capabilities of humans and animals, and of the Creator's ingenious design; to Darwin, they

are innate and adaptive mechanisms of survival.

Another point of comparison relates to "hybrid" or "compound" emotions. According to Bell, the purest expression such as laughter is seen only in infants, who later "ceased to have the pure and simple source . . . the feelings are compound and restrained, the mind is in a state of more compound feeling" (180). Thus, an adult usually shows more complex emotional expression that reflects the mingling and oscillation of various emotions. Such hybrid emotions in action can be impulsive and autonomous. Darwin derives similar ideas regarding compound emotions from his own observations, while Scottish philosopher Alexander Bain claims hybrid emotions arise through the coexistence of happiness and pain or love and hatred, designated by such phrases as "surprisingly joyful" and "violent pain." These ideas clarify Dickens's emotionality (simultaneously laughing and crying), as revealed in Forster's *Life* as well as his fictional characters' hybrid or compound emotions—for example, Scrooge's behavior at the end of *A Christmas Carol*:

"I don't know what to do," cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoon of himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy! I am as giddy as a drunken man! A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!" (CC 127)

Such an articulation is not simply a synthesis of two different "basic" emotions being revealed at the same time, but an intermingling of the two—representing, in modern terms, a "higher cognitive" emotion.¹⁰ While not associated with any typical facial expression, this scene evidences Scrooge's highly reflective emotional involvement and self-knowledge. Here, Scrooge is joyous for his new-born self, having just undergone a crisis similar to a "near-death experience" and survived destitution, loss, and loneliness. The union of two emotions yields an internally coherent emotion—Scrooge's mental state, after all, has been transformed.

This study of emotional expression in Dickens's novels has considered the influence of Victorian art and scientific investigation on literary production.¹¹ If a concordance of Dickens's expressions of emotions were compiled, its most prominent focus would be hybrid emotions in his literature and life, as reflected in Angus Wilson's comment on "the intuitive Dickens, the laughing, crying child inside the bearded public man in a frock coat" (15).¹² The juxtaposition of Dickens's expressions of emotions with popular concepts of phrenology and physiognomy, and with scientific studies of the mind, offers new possibilities for interpreting his work. The increased emotional complexity of later characters bears witness to Dickens's intellectual development and awareness of studies of emotion in the art and science of the time. The expression "Old Lamps for New Ones" highlights the ways historical contextualization and biographical correlation foster new insights and a fuller

¹⁰ Such higher cognitive emotions as love, guilt, shame, embarrassment, pride, envy and jealousy are influenced by conscious thoughts; they are universal, but more culturally variable than basic emotions. See Ekman's *Emotion Revealed*; Scherer and Ekman, *Approaches to Emotion*; and Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music, and Art*.

¹¹ Catherine Robson notes, "it is probably time for one of the favorites of old-style Victorian interdisciplinary studies to come back into fashion" (248).

¹² See *GE* (78, 121, 226, 124, 169, 187, 297). See also Dickens's review of Robert Hunt's *The Poetry of Science* in the *Examiner* in 1848 (Fielding and Lai 8).

picture of the resourcefulness of Dickens's fictions within his cultural milieu.¹³

National Sun-Yat Sen University

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THE SPECTER OF CLASS: REVISION, HYBRID IDENTITY,
AND PASSING IN **GREAT EXPECTATIONS**

BY STACY FLOYD

Charles Dickens's bicentennial prompts reconsideration of his contemporary relevance. What is the postmodern conception of *Dickensian*? Aside from their obvious entertainment value, what point of contact do his novels offer twenty-first-century readers? Interestingly, Dickens's critiques of class issues are as relevant today as when they were written. At no modern time has the growing gulf between the haves and have-nots appeared more clearly than now, and at no point have the halls of academia been more filled with first-generation college students—students crossing the gulf between the world of their working-class families and the promise of middle-class prosperity that college education represents. The identity struggles these students face mirror Dickens's personal battles with the hidden injuries of class and essentialist notions of identity. The text that best exemplifies explorations of identity crises—for Victorians and postmoderns alike—is *Great Expectations*.

As the symbol of class consciousness, Estella points out that young Pip "calls the knaves, jacks, this boy . . . and what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!" (*GE* 55). Pip reflects that he had "never thought of being ashamed of [his] hands before" but "her contempt for [him] was so strong that it became infectious, and [he] caught it." Estella's disgust over Pip's bodily and linguistic *habitus*—the way his body is animated and the dispositions it enacts—is in fact "catching" or contagious as Pip internalizes her disregard for his working-class self and, in one of literature's most shameful moments, applies that to the good-natured Joe.¹ Pip's experience, though based on class, is not unlike Franz Fanon's description of internalizing racial stereotypes: "I subjected myself to an objective examination. I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics . . . I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object" (112). Once Pip objectifies himself by rejecting his class association, he shifts from seeing the "kitchen as a chaste though not magnificent apartment" and "the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence" to admitting that "[n]ow it was all coarse and common, and I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on any account" (*GE* 99). Pip has not only internalized the *commonness* of his position in Estella's view, but he has revised his notion of self and, consciously or not, begun the process of class-passing.

The term "passing" was originally associated with race, but its appropriation by gender studies, especially studies of performativity, highlights the constructed nature of both race and gender.² Passing as another gender for access to better economic situations or personal freedom is pervasive in popular culture.³ However, applying the term to class studies is complicated since class lacks the overt physical markers of race and gender. Yet, class is embodied, and many aspects of passing relate to race, gender, *and* class. In

¹ *Habitus* is Pierre Bourdieu's term for bodily "practices" or habits through which our bodies display cultural understandings; see *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972).

² Feminists Sherry Ortner, Gayle Rubin, and Nancy Chodorow proposed reasons other than biology for gender differences, including culture and psychology. Judith Butler is best known for her theory of performativity in which gender is "an identity tenuously constituted in time . . . through a stylized repetition of acts" (402).

³ For example, the play *M. Butterfly* (1988), the Disney movie *Mulan* (1998), and the film *The Crying Game* (1992).

each case, the passer moves from what he or she feels is a position of subordination and oppression to one of relative freedom and privilege—even if the move is temporary or shifting. Passing often involves the desire to be in a different social setting than one is currently allowed, thus it always both assumes and interrogates categories and hierarchies. While class passing does not necessarily transgress legal boundaries, it does transgress social boundaries. Just as race passing creates a category crisis, class passing destabilizes the system of boundaries and rewards based on social identity. Ironically, despite Pip's use of the term, passing is about being more "common" or normal within an established social environment. For Pip, the desire to "pass" as a gentleman begins with the need to be *undistinguished*—not different from Estella but rather what he quickly perceives is "normative." Recasting essentialist notions of identity, *Great Expectations* offers an image of identity formation as dialectic, with past, present, and emerging selves reflecting on and communicating with one's constant revision of subjectivity. When this interplay is denied or repressed, it renders characters static. Joe's unchanging simplicity, Jaggers's constant professional performance, and Miss Havisham's inability to move beyond a moment in the past all exemplify the dangers of an essentialist and static identity.⁴ Through its presentation of hybrid or amalgamated positionalities, the novel confirms the performativity of class, the fluidity of class-related identity boundaries, and the internalized stigma of growing up working class in a society that values higher status. Simultaneously, the text, like its creator, attempts to affirm middle-class domestic values and a nostalgic desire to reconnect with essentialist understandings of identity. The tension between these two threads destabilizes readers' concepts of class and identity, all the while revealing the conflicts inherent in a liminal class consciousness—the consciousness revealed in Dickens's biography and work.

The Hidden Injuries of Class

Richard Sennet and Jonathon Cobb identify three key issues for those born into the working class who eventually "move up": powerlessness, perceived inadequacy, and the perpetual impulse to prove themselves (41). Despite having passed into a higher social or educational circle than that in which they were born, they must constantly reaffirm their adequacy to occupy that position. In social contexts where middle-class is the standard measure for "success," simply existing as a member of the working class can result in childhood feelings of guilt and shame that carry over into adulthood, especially if one moves out of the working class. Charles Dickens's letters and biographies reveal his lifelong suffering from these conflicts, always overworking himself, balancing shame with an enlarged ego, and perpetually insecure about money, even once he achieves wealth.⁵ Three primary factors—his father's liminal class position, imprisonment in the Marshalsea, and working at Warren's Blacking Factory—shaped Dickens's wariness of

⁴ In each case the "simplicity," "professionalism," and frozen moment are linked to class and gender expectations. Miss Havisham's aborted wedding marks the moment when, as the daughter of a wealthy man, she was most commodified, reduced to her class and gender. Her inability to perform successfully in that role (through no fault of her own except perhaps bad character judgment) renders her unable to do anything but replay the part in stagnation. It is only after she sees what else she might have done—through Pip's proclamation to Estella—that she moves beyond the role of jilted bride by helping Herbert. According to Davidoff and Hall, "the consciousness of class always takes a gendered form" (13).

⁵ Dickens' second trip to America in 1867-68 included over one hundred public readings and left him ill and emotionally exhausted; yet he could not resist the financial gain (over ten thousand pounds) to be made.

working-class status. He was simultaneously ashamed of and obsessed with his childhood factory work: he never told anyone but John Forster about it, yet he fictionalized it—or at least the sense of its associated childhood injustice—in many of his novels. Certainly the blacking experience, like Pip's evaluation by Estella, was the first real occasion for identity-revision; as Kathleen Strange notes, "he felt keenly the humiliation, the humbling of middle-class self-identity and self-worth" and had his "early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in [his] breast" (qtd. Kaplan 39).⁶ Though Dickens always blamed his father's financial irresponsibility and feared it was an inherited trait, it was the family's overextended lifestyle that first positioned the middle-class as normative in his mind. He could not have been "humiliated" or "humbled" by factory-work if he did not understand his position to be above it. This disconnect between the way he viewed himself and the position he found himself in as a young boy emerges as a guilt-filled specter of class—a constant striving against feelings of inadequacy that haunts Dickens's life and fiction.⁷

Pip understands the relationship between guilt and shame: "[i]t is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home" (GE 99). In *Facing Shame*, therapists Fossum and Mason describe guilt as linked to feelings about actions while shame describes feelings about oneself: "While guilt is a painful feeling of regret and responsibility for one's actions, shame is a painful feeling about oneself as a person" (86). However, Dianne K. Daeg de Mott views both guilt and shame as related to one's feelings about one's self; guilt is "an emotional state produced by thoughts that we have not lived up to our ideal self and could have done otherwise" (n.p.). While "healthy guilt" is more focused on actions, "Unhealthy guilt can be instilled when a child is continually barraged with shaming statements that criticize the child's self, rather than focusing on the specific harmful behavior." For example, Mrs. Joe claims that Pip is a "little monkey" who will "drive [her] to the churchyard," since she is bringing "him up by hand" (GE 7-8); and when Estella suggests that Pip might have called the "jacks" something else, had different hands or worn other shoes, he envisions an "ideal self" separate from himself. But these feelings do not begin with the narrative's introduction of Estella; Dickens maps these class associations onto the novel's plot immediately, using the opening chapter's adventure with the convict to highlight Pip's connections between a working-class subjectivity and the feelings of inadequacy that can be triggered by later cross-class interactions. As he takes supplies to the convict, Pip's "guilty mind" imagines the gates and dikes yelling "Stop him" and the cows calling him a "young thief" (14). This episode links Pip's guilt to his convict-like behaviour (stealing food), but his shame stems from his perceived similarity to the man he fearfully helps. Dickens animalizes both man and boy; when Magwitch eats, Pip compares him to a large dog: "he swallowed or rather snapped up, every mouthful," while Mr. Pumblechook's Christmas dinner sermon compares Pip to a pig. Later, at Miss Havisham's Satis House, Pip is led to the courtyard and "fed in a dog-like manner" (82). In this animal-state, he encounters the pale young gentleman who wants to fight; despite his lack of initiation, Pip feels guilty, convinced that "something would be done" to him because "village boys could not go stalking about the country, ravaging the houses of

⁶ See Kaplan (38) and Forster's *Life* (I:25-26).

⁷ Wilkie Collins observed of Dickens: "A man who can do nothing by halves seems to me a fearful man" (qtd. in Phyllis Rose 177).

gentlefolks and pitching into the studious youth of England" (86). Further, when he returns home from an evening of listening to Mr. Wopsle read Barnwell and discovers that Mrs. Joe has been attacked, he believes that he must have "had some hand in the attack upon my sister" (112). "In the clearer light of the next morning" he takes a "more reasonable" view of the situation," but his propensity to assume guilt is telling. By tying Pip's feelings of guilt and shame to more than just one experience with a haughty girl, Dickens complicates not only his plot but readers' understandings of a class-based identity that results in a desire to pass.

The yearning to feel adequate in another social setting prompts Pip's "great expectations." Passing is about opportunity, something Dickens understood; trying on new subjectivities, interrogating an essentialism that would have left him forever the son of the Marshalsea and Warren's Blacking Factory, Dickens, like the act of passing itself, both confirmed middle-class ideologies and categories and blurred their boundaries. For both the author and his unfortunate, often orphaned young creations, talent and luck, hard work and successful *passing* temporarily relieve haunting feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy; but, as *Great Expectations* shows, one must ultimately embrace the specters of all one's past selves in order to find contentment.

Great Expectations highlights the ways performances of middle-class values offer one a sense of control—an uneasy adequacy that often proves only temporary. Like race and gender, class holds power over identity formation because one ethnicity, gender, and class emerges as "normal" and is therefore unquestioned. Pip could not have understood himself and Joe as "ignorant and backward" if society had not established alternative dispositions as normative (*GE* 65). Just as Pamela Caughie claims that racial and heterosexual passing "participates in the cultural production of whiteness as 'racially pure,' ethnicity as 'origin' and heterosexuality as 'normative,'" the same kind of cultural production goes on in relation to class, with middle and upper-class statuses viewed as "normative" and "pure" (22). From Mr. Wopsle's attempts at classical oration to the books he reads in the great aunt's "school," Pip observes middle and upper-class values. Domestic ideology places women (and their sexuality) on a pedestal, values harmony in the home, cleanliness to the point that domestic work is invisible, and a separation of spheres that promotes the patriarch's authority, even as he moves from the sphere of work to the domestic "heaven" promised him upon his return home. Mrs. Joe's ironic attempts to realize this domestic ideal, with her starched-white apron, changes of curtains, and demands that he not "bolt his food" mimic a middle-class domestic ideology that first protected England against social "intruders" like the Irish and the working class, and later promoted Englishness as the head of an empirical global family.⁸ Dickens, the father of fireside values (*The Christmas Books*), allows Pip and Joe's cozy corner by the fire both to illustrate those values and distort them, with childlike Joe an ineffectual patriarch and every inch of the house away from that corner a threat to Pip's emotional and physical well-being. This conflicted message exemplifies the struggle working-class people face when attempting to pass by embracing middle-class ideology.⁹

⁸ See Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* on imperial domesticity and the global family (ch. 1).

⁹ In America, Dickens found it "difficult to be either a gentleman or an artist in such a world" (Kaplan 138). He "identified with the upper middle class's assumption of aristocratic personal values and liberal middle-class politics" and believed the current class system to be "the solid structure on which a civilization higher than the American had been constructed" (141). Yet in other ways he identified with the working classes, feeling that

Similarly, when Pip learns he will be a gentleman, he experiences a complicated mix of new power and lingering inadequacy. Dickens illustrates how a shift in social standing changes one's control over others. Mr. Trabb, the tailor, barely notices the young man when he enters his shop; he "did not think it worth his while to come out . . . but called [Pip] in to him" (*GE* 140). After learning of Pip's "handsome property . . . a change passed over Mr. Trabb," who now addresses Pip as "Sir." Dickens juxtaposes Trabb's dialogue with the newly-established Pip—"Do me the favour to be seated, sir"—with that to his shop boy—"I'll knock your head off" (141). Likewise, Pip gains authority with Mr. Pumblechook, who shakes his hand ridiculously often and even asks the younger man for "advice in reference to his own [financial] affairs" (145). Despite this show of respect and flattery, Pip retains uncertain feelings, noting that the first night of his "bright fortunes should be the loneliest [he] had ever known," and "the second night," after an argument with Bidley over the need to spruce up Joe's manners, "as lonely and unsatisfactory as the first" (140). During the week before travelling to London, he recounts "with something like shame" his childhood experience with the convict and feels remorse over his decision not to let Joe take the coach with him into town. Ending "The First Stage of Pip's Expectations" with echoes of shame and inadequacy foreshadows how these hidden injuries will remain with Pip even as he shifts class and learns to perform as a gentleman.¹⁰

Dickens explores class passing as both performance and performativity. Here, performance refers to acting intentionally as one is not in order to fool others or oneself, while performativity refers to a less conscious, embodied change of identity over time—identity actualized through a "regulated process of repetition" (Butler, *Gender* 185). While Pip's process of becoming a gentleman has elements of sheer performance, it is not done in order to fool or deceive anyone; it is a process involving education and the acquisition of new dispositions. The remaking of Pip's *habitus* begins immediately with new clothes that mark him "a genteel figure" despite their discomfort (*GE* 135). Even before Pip steps into these clothes, he begins mimicking Estella, telling Joe and Bidley that he prefers not to wear his new outfit in the village because "they would make such a business of it—such a coarse and common business." While he repeats Estella's early words to him, he does not mimic the feeling behind them; those judgments have become his own. Pip's first meal with Herbert Pocket illustrates the performativity involved in this new role as gentleman. In this hilarious scene, Dickens mocks the arbitrary rules governing who is a gentleman while confirming and breaking performance-related boundaries. The meal scene is framed by the story of Miss Havisham's background, a story hinging on deceitful performance, the dangers implicit when lower-class people can pretend to be upper class. The lover who jilted Miss Havisham was "a showy man" but not one to be "mistaken for a gentleman," Herbert warns, because, according to his father, "no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was . . . a true gentleman in manner" (168). Herbert proves to be both. Offering Pip brief, parenthetical suggestions—"it is not the custom to put the knife

the "people needed to be roused"; and, while he saw the classes as already in conflict and wanted to reconcile them, "he did not want to alienate the middle class, without whose support he thought reform impossible" (330-31).

¹⁰ In chapter twenty-nine, when Pip encounters Estella again after becoming a gentleman, he continues to suffer from inadequacy. She had been away at school and "was so much changed, was so much more beautiful, so much more womanly . . . had made such advance, that I seemed to have made none" (219). This exemplifies the working-class tendency to always feel behind the mark; no matter what the accomplishment, it does not measure up to where one *should* be.

in the mouth—for fear of accidents," and "society as a body does not expect one to be so strictly conscientious in emptying one's glass, as to turn it bottom upwards with the rim on one's nose"—Herbert educates Pip in the art of manners without causing him shame (166-67). Dickens ties passing to education as Mr. Pocket explains to Pip that he is not to be educated for a profession but rather to "hold his own" with young men "in prosperous circumstances" (183). He advises him to go to the theater, something Pip honestly enjoys. Like Joe, whose "clumsy manner of coming up-stairs" reveals him to Pip before he emerges, Pip's performativity of upper-class dispositions—increasingly subconscious over time—reveals how class becomes marked on the body, socially constructed but naturalized through this embodiment.

Dickens uses parody to distinguish this earnest experience of multiple subjectivities from performances deliberately intended to deceive. Once in London, Pip's initial meeting with Jaggers exposes a world of deceitful performance, with a hired witness, obviously drunk, dressed up "like a 'spectable pieman. A sort of pastry cook'" (*GE* 156). Jaggers's clerk, Wemmick, performs two identities: "a dry man" with "a square wooden face" that looks chipped out with a chisel; in his London persona, he fits into his employer's office by showing no feelings or "sentiments," and professes the value of "portable property" (158)—an assessment that Pip later revises when he meets him in the guise of the "Walworth Wemmick." Obviously intended to amuse, images of Jaggers shaking the clerk for bringing such a bad witness and Wemmick firing his canon also leave readers and Pip on unsteady ground. Which is the real Wemmick? Are witnesses not trustworthy? The text repeatedly deconstructs the idea of a single identity by asking Pip and readers to make interpretations based on different scenarios. The more plural our interpretations, the more the text reflects the instability of our identities.

Joe's character offers a buffer to our discomfort over this instability; his consistency comforts readers' desire for essentialist understandings of class and identity, offering the strongest "anti-performance" message. While some argue that Joe the blacksmith is portrayed as more moral and gentlemanly than upper class men, his child-like backwardness and ineffectiveness as head of household also support images of racial degeneration associated with the working class. Despite his goodness, perhaps because of it, he promotes resignation to one's position—a lack of questioning on the part of the lower classes—and his consistency of character hints at an essentialism regarding identity that the main, more fluid characters, and the plot itself, disavows. Joe offers a sympathetic reason for why he does not "rise up" against the tyranny of Mrs. Joe: first of all, she is a "master mind" and he is not; and secondly, because he saw his mother abused by his unemployed, alcoholic father and is "dead afeard of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman" (*GE* 45). Joe's identity is so static, and he sees identities as so incapable of change, that he cannot imagine taking on even a little of his father's characteristics without becoming him entirely. In Joe's world view, one either is or is not an abuser, and there is no room for fluid identity boundaries. Resignation to one's class-based identity is safer than the alternative; in fact, Joe seems incapable of even attempting class-passing—even his Sunday clothes betray him: "Nothing that he wore then fitted him or seemed to belong to him" (20). Unable to dress himself out of his class position, Joe cannot talk himself out of it either. During the interview with Miss Havisham, he is unable to speak to her and must address her through Pip, revealing his own sense of

unworthiness directly to address a lady. As a result, Pip is not only ashamed of Joe but ashamed of being ashamed of Joe. The former impulse indicates affects related to his class position—his desire to be a better person *socially*, while the latter reveals emotions based on his wish to be a better person *morally*, one that could stand by Joe despite his awkward social performance. These conflicted emotions peak when Joe visits Pip in London and, in another tensely comical scene, readers move from smiling at Joe's pronunciation of "architectooraloral" while dropping more food than he eats to cringing at Pip's reference to his "clumsy manners" (206-07). However, it is Joe's "anti-passing" speech that ends the chapter, bringing Pip (and perhaps the reader) to tears. Moved to refer to his adopted son as "Pip, dear old chap" instead of "Sir," Joe declares his presentation of himself in dress clothes to be "wrong": "Divisions among such must come, and must be met as they come . . . you shall never see me no more in these clothes. I'm wrong in these clothes. I'm wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th' meshes" (209). Joe's "wrong" could easily be translated as feeling "inadequate" or "powerless" once out of his natural environment of the forge. Yet, instead of fighting these feelings or trying to acquire the cultural tools that might make him feel "right," Joe offers Dickens's middle-class audience a safe, resigned image of working-class identity. He is safe to middle-class readers in part because he accuses *himself* of being "wrong" and out of place, instead of questioning social injustice.

Mr. Wopsle's theater performance as Hamlet—an obvious metaphor for social performance—stirs uncomfortable feelings in Pip. Watching the ill-prepared Wopsle ridiculed by the crowd and noting that Claudius' ghost does not know his lines fuels the comedy (even Pip admits to laughing aloud); but this display of one taking on an identity he is not equipped to play lingers with Pip, who ends the night feeling "miserably," dreaming of having to marry a poor girl like Herbert's Clara or performing Hamlet to Miss Havisham's ghost "without knowing twenty words of it" (*GE* 240). Like Joe's attempts to pass in Pip's London apartment, Wopsle's attempts to do so on stage highlight the sense of inadequacy that accompanies crossing identity boundaries, while the humor in the scenes alleviates antagonisms surrounding more threatening instances of passing.

Through the Pockets, Dickens offers another humorous yet unsettling display of performance. Unlike Joe's and Wopsle's temporary and harmless attempts to pass, Mrs. Pocket's "invented . . . conviction" that her grandfather was robbed of a baronetcy, along with her expectation that she should live the life of a titled woman, render the Pocket home ineffectual on multiple levels: the servants run the house, Mr. Pocket's lack of domestic control leaves him feeling inadequate—literally pulling his hair while young Joe has a "hole in his frill" and little Fanny a whitlow (*GE* 176). "[G]uarded from the acquisition of plebeian domestic knowledge" by her own fantasy of aristocracy and a servant staff that benefits from her delusions, Mrs. Pocket's disruption of bourgeois domestic values renders her husband an ineffectual a middle-class patriarch. The domestic harmony associated with middle-class life escapes this home obsessed with aristocracy, just as the Gargary home failed to provide Pip the safe haven of fire-side values, in part perhaps due to Mrs. Gargary's obsession with middle-class domestic values involving curtains and cleanliness. Not being resigned to one's position and deceitfully performing another both result in disharmony.

While these examples mask discomfort regarding boundary confusion with humor, Dickens's portrayal of Compeyson offers the most straight-forward and dangerous example of performance-based passing. While Herbert first describes the "showy man" who might

be "mistaken for a gentleman," Magwitch tells the full story of this con-artist who "set up for a gentleman" (*GE* 322). Since he was "a smooth one to talk" and "had learning," he could pass as a gentleman, putting him in the company of upper-class people whom he could swindle. Compeyson's crimes include "swindling, handwriting forging, stolen bank-note passing, and such-like" (323); all involve false identities, marking him as dangerous because of his ability to pass and thus endanger the upper classes. The author's conflicted presentation of passing as both the result of genuine change and deceitful performance reflects his own complex position as one who benefited from the former and, as a current member of the upper-middle class, is threatened by the latter. This complexity also mirrors the period's anxiety regarding class boundaries.

Like much middle-class literature, including Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, and Collins' *Armada*, *Great Expectations* seems to fear (and certainly does not reward) the penetration of class boundaries. Passing as someone or some class one is not powerfully highlights one's ability to create or recreate the self; it is dangerous to those invested in keeping various ideological boundaries in place because, while it reinforces the existence of binaries, it also disrupts them, blurring the lines between the very oppositions that make it necessary. Punishing passers is a staple of nineteenth-century literature, for example Becky Sharp, Helen Talboys, and Henry Jekyll; by narrating scenes of passing and then punishing the passers, fiction simultaneously resists and reinforces the historical realities reshaping social boundaries.

Industrialization promoted social mobility by creating the conditions for a more fluid social structure. Education, urbanization, and changes in the occupational composition of classes fostered more fluid class boundaries. As Robin Gilmour notes, "More than any previous generation, the people we call Victorians were driven to find models of social harmony and personal conduct by means of which they could understand, control, and develop their rapidly changing world" (20). For instance, Gilmour contends that new public schools and changing definitions of the "gentleman" were creating a common ground on which people of different classes "could meet with dignity" (167). Similarly, Jonathan Rose attributes the narrowing of the "cultural gap" separating the working and educated classes to emerging public libraries and cheap editions of literature; indeed, "literacy may have been the most crucial arena in the working-class struggle" because the "autodidact demolished justification for privilege . . . and provoked a Tory growl" (230). Urbanization turned cities into spaces where the slums and suburbs were physically separated;¹¹ but cross-class mingling on city streets put the banker, clerk, prostitute and nomad all in close proximity (Rosenman 17).¹² Things *low* and *high*—including art, aesthetics, social spaces and even bodies—were neatly organized in English culture and, while transgressing such hierarchies caused a stir in the nineteenth-century, such slippages became increasingly common.¹³ Educational opportunities and blended urban spaces enabled working-class Victorians to participate in Samuel Smiles' ideology of upward-mobility through "self help."

¹¹ See Fredrick Engels's "The Great Towns" for an analysis of how working-class slums are kept hidden from the middle and upper classes (*The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 1845).

¹² Ellen Rosenman discusses the city as an anonymous public space where contagion could be spread "across geographical and class boundaries" and people can appear as what they are not because they are "[s]tripped of reliable markers of family, class, and character by the anonymous, democratic space of the city" (52, 54).

¹³ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986) argues that the "top's" attempts to reject the "bottom" reveal a dependent relationship between *high* and *low* culture (Introduction i-xi).

With the idea of “class” no longer a stable notion, young men like Charles Dickens could dream big, illustrated by the famous story of Dickens’ walk with his father to the house on Gad’s Hill. As the younger Dickens admires what must have seemed a mansion, his father tells him that if “he were to be very persevering and were to work hard, [he] might some day come to live in it” (Kaplan 23).¹⁴ Crossing London’s domestic boundaries, his moves from Dougherty Street to Devonshire Terrace and, ultimately, to that very Gad’s Hill estate confirm his early belief that “he would be a gentleman by talent and achievement” (34). But scholars of his life know that he could be anything he wanted to be through performance.

Dickens spent nearly as much time orchestrating private plays as he did writing; this theatricality revealed his need to occupy many subjectivities at once. He could not have created the range of characters he did without it. Kaplan claims that his public image “combined sober Victorian responsibility with a touch of Romantic theatricality. But he was a whole cast of characters himself, a performance personality with as long a list of disguised and fully dressed variants on the basic model as the list of characters in any one of his novels” (535). His later dramatic “readings,” which were theatrical in nature, allowed him to inhabit certain of his characters. He is said to have become so emotionally involved in performing the role of Bill Sikes in “The murder of Nancy”—a reading from *Oliver Twist*—that he would often faint or have to lie down with a raging pulse afterward. Clearly, Dickens does not condemn the mutability of class positions, subjectivities or using theatrical performance (on and off the stage) to experience multiple positionalities; however, haunted by his own experiences, his depiction of identity formation in *Great Expectations* repeatedly comes back to the question of adequacy (or the lack). By deconstructing notions of a fixed identity, the narrative structure enacts a process of revision, in which characters and readers have multiple opportunities to re-see each other and themselves.

Passing as Re-vision

Great Expectations explores Dickens’s understandings of identity formation: as a professional, experienced reader of human nature, Dickens depicts young people’s developing identities as dependent on their abilities accurately to read and re-read themselves and others, to compare old drafts to new ones and communicate between the two. Dickens depicts a savvy dialectic between shifting identity drafts, none more genuine than the other but the most recent version in communication with all those that came before. For Dickens, there is no false draft in identity formation: rather, just as a final draft of writing embodies all those that came before it, the most currently constructed identity one lives with embodies all those earlier versions of self.

The novel contests nineteenth-century discourse of class “passing” that depicts the upwardly-mobile as “false” performers who cloak their “true” identities while infiltrating a space where they do not belong. Instead of this calculated performance, *Great Expectations* presents identity as something constantly under revision—a natural, ongoing re-seeing of the self and others that incorporates aspects of the old and the new. Multiple characters’ acts of passing function as textual strategies that destabilize readers’ understanding of characterization and class. Dickens creates a fantasy based on false images of class identity and Pip’s flawed understanding of how different he is from the higher classes.

¹⁴ He later notes, “I used to look at it as a wonderful mansion (which God knows it is not) when I was a very odd little child with the first shadows of all my books in my head” (Kaplan 347).

For instance, Wemmick both lives in and disrupts an identity and class-based binary. His identity divided between London and Walworth, he asserts the either/or aspect of identity but defies it by successfully inhabiting both personas. His dual performance as a clerk (in London) and lord of a castle (in Walworth) emphasizes that the ability to occupy multiple positionalities is integral Dickens’s purpose.

Class-based identity-deception proliferates in this novel: the convict Magwitch is Pip’s benefactor; wealthy Miss Havisham is the ex-lover of a convict; haughty, rich Estella is the daughter of a murderous maid. Such undermining of assumptions about characters’ class and economic status reveals identity to be problematically plural—always able to move beyond prescribed class limits. For example, in chapter thirty-two, when Pip tours Newgate with Wemmick, he is oppressed “by all this taint of prison and crime” (*GE* 245); in chapter thirty-three, when he escorts Estella to Richmond, he is struck by “the contrast between the jail and her,” making him anxious to “beat the prison dust off [his] feet” and “exhale its air from [his] lungs” (246). Later realizations of Estella’s connections to convicts disrupt not only an evaluation Pip (and readers) make about individuals but the false assumptions he has internalized about class—what it looks like, how it is embodied. All these plot deceptions happen without anyone intending to defraud, to act like a class they are not. And, all of these misconceptions cause both Pip and readers literally to re-see characters about whom they have already made conclusions. Pip’s outward attempts to pass reflect an exaggeration of what the novel shows happening beneath the surface throughout society. Given all the complex identities around him, Pip’s sudden awareness of his “commonness” in chapter eight leads him to internalize Estella’s image of him, resulting in his first serious, though flawed, re-vision of himself, those around him, and the social boundaries that affect them all.

The novel articulates the ways identities are retrospective, even nostalgic. For instance, the narrative begins with a story of lost origins, as young Pip ponders over the graves of his parents, known to him only by way of the cold stone and letters that attempt to identify them:

The shape of the letters of my father’s [grave] gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man with curly, black hair. From the character and turn of the description, “Also Georgiana, Wife of the Above,” I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. (*GE* 1)

Pip dates the beginning of his figuring out “the identity of things” to this day, just before his first encounter with the convict. His identity involves a nostalgic construction—a constant looking backward and forward to maintain a sense of “self.” Subsequently, the text reveals the tension between nostalgia for an essentialism that guarantees concrete identities and the fluidity of characters’ subjectivities and positionalities. Dickens captures this dialectic through his rhetorical “now/then” strategy: “for I was inwardly crying for her *then*, and I know what I know of the pain she cost me afterward”; “I did not know *then*, though I think I know *now*”; “I had liked it *once*, but once was not *now*” (76, 89, 98; emphases added). The past and present, as well as how we saw in the past and see in the present, remain in constant dialogue, informing and altering our identities along with our perceptions of others.

Some characters try to insist on single definitions of identity. Jaggers is his lawyer self twenty-four hours a day; whether in the Blue Boar Tavern, the street, or his own home, he is always in court, exacting precise words, cross-examining, and carefully removing anything that could destabilize his role. Similarly, Estella is unable to shift from the “heartless” role for which she blames Miss Havisham; despite Pip’s attempts to destabilize her identity role, she moves into a bad marriage, unable to re-see herself or Pip. Miss Havisham embodies someone stuck in a nostalgic positionality—living the present completely in relation to a past she enacts through the stoppage of clocks and the materials strewn about her faded yellow home. She fantasizes a time in the future when, dead, she will be laid in her yellow wedding dress on the long table with the rotten bridal cake. Forever the jilted bride, this day will fully symbolize the identity closure she has prematurely enacted. When Pip returns to visit her and Estella, just returned from school, the scene juxtaposes the young people’s re-visionings of themselves and each other with Miss Havisham’s unchanged persona. Dickens stresses the visual evaluation with a focus on eyes and looking: Pip fails to recognize Estella until she “lifted up her eyes and looked archly at me, and then I saw that the eyes were Estella’s eyes” (*GE* 219). With a “greedy look,” Miss Havisham inquires whether Pip finds Estella much changed, and when she asks Estella the same regarding Pip, Estella says “very much” while “looking at” him. Their discourse as well as Pip’s narrated reflections weave these new observations and past remembrances together throughout the scene. Despite the looking backward and forward to reassess themselves and each other, Pip finds Miss Havisham “near the *old* table, in the *old* dress,” and he pushes her “round the *old* slow circuit about the ashes of the bridal feast” (218, 222; emphases added). Dickens reveals the dangers of a static identity through Miss Havisham’s slow decay; indeed, by the time she is willing to reassess and revise, it is too late.

Dickens naturalizes the concepts of hybrid, developing identities by having most of the characters (re)evaluate others’ class positions or potential class positions based on visual observations of their *dispositions*. Repeatedly, because positionalities change and performances are not foolproof, one’s evaluations must be revised. Chapter seventeen features Pip’s reevaluation of Biddy as she moves from being the frumpy aid of Mr. Wopsle’s aunt to a flowering young woman whose “hair grew bright” and whose “hands were always clean” (*GE* 117). Pip understands the appropriateness of courting her were it not for the fact that “she was common, and could not be like Estella.” Indicative of his immaturity, Pip’s revision of his view of Biddy fails to overcome essentialist notions of identity: he senses that even in her old days as a helper in the evening school he must have noticed what was “latent” in her as he sought her out for a tutor. Estella mimics these notions during the reunion scene when she reduces the difference between blacksmith-apprentice Pip and Gentleman Pip to this directive: “what was fit company for you once would be quite unfit company for you now” (221). Estella still sees Pip as a “silly boy” and herself as someone without a heart. Dickens presents Pip’s and Estella’s ability to do non-essentialist re-vision of others and themselves as a slow process of maturity.

In the reunion scene between Pip and the Pale Young Gentleman, now identified as Herbert Pocket, Dickens offers two complicated symbols of hybrid identities. The first involves Herbert’s renaming of Pip as Handel, based on “a charming piece of music by Handel called ‘The Harmonious Blacksmith’” (*GE* 165). This new title retains the

goodness or “harmoniousness” of his blacksmith background, while foreshadowing Pip’s introduction to higher culture. It also, less consciously, might offer what Herbert (and Dickens) would consider a more palatable version of the working class. Just as Dickens drew on childhood poverty and humiliation in his writing, the name *Handel* serves both to romanticize Pip’s background and culturally surpass it. The second moment involves a metaphor Herbert recalls his father using to explain how he knew Miss Havisham’s fiancé was no “gentleman”: “He says no varnish can hide the grain of the wood, and that the more varnish you put on the more the grain will express itself” (168). While the varnish metaphor seems to support the standard middle-class belief that one’s true self will “out” itself eventually—that one cannot hide one’s bad aspects for long—it could also be read as a confirmation that new social performances or revisions cannot and should not eliminate our old selves. The grain does indeed keep coming through, infiltrating the new coats of varnish, but the varnish does not disappear—we are both what we started as and all we have added. The text suggests that mistakes regarding identity take two forms: assuming one is essentially the grain, thus remaining static, or assuming one can repress the grain and be only the varnish.

Pip makes the latter mistake, trying to be only the latest version of himself, spiffed up with formal and cultural education. However, his early self, complete with fireside love of Joe and convict relations refuses to be completely covered by the varnish. At pivotal moments in the text it emerges to haunt him, resulting in his ongoing feelings of inadequacy. No matter how well-equipped he becomes to live the life of a gentleman, he never feels happy in it. Socializing with Estella leaves him “miserable” and, even out and about town with Herbert, he finds himself unfulfilled: “We were always more or less miserable. . . . There was a gay fiction among us that we were constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did” (*GE* 256). One could read this as Dickens’s ongoing support of the working class being resigned to their positions for their own sakes, especially given the positive example of Joe. However, the text moves beyond condemning Pip’s expectations: it understands his new identity as real and, by constantly forcing the re-visioning of identities, it ultimately affirms their hybridity and fluidity.

Pip finds himself in the presence of people with fixed ideas of identity and is drawn to them: first Joe, then Miss Havisham and Estella. Ironically, the figure that repulses him—the convict—is the first person for whom Pip’s influence destabilizes his role. Through Pip, Able Magwitch moves from being a convict to a hard worker and ultimately a benefactor. Magwitch claims that during his years abroad, it was Pip’s image that kept him going. Influenced by how being perceived a gentleman worked in Compeyson’s favor during their trial, even the convict internalizes a preference for the gentlemanly and repays Pip for changing his sense of self by changing Pip’s. Briefly, Pip even melts Mr. Jaggers’s gruff exterior and exposes the duality of Wemmick’s life. Disordering the usual ways of Mr. Jaggers’s office, Pip interrogates the lawyer regarding Estella’s parentage; but in these reverse roles, he holds more answers than Jaggers, who “relax[es] into something like a smile” when Pip collapses Wemmick’s binary lifestyle by mentioning his “pleasant home” and “cheerful playful ways” while in the office. Repeatedly, Pip’s presence destabilizes people’s inscribed roles (ch. 51).

Less knowingly, Pip finally destabilizes Miss Havisham’s characterization; watching him plead with Estella and hearing his honest admission of love, she “put her hand to her

heart and held it there" (*GE* 338). This symbolic reawakening of her feelings results in her later calling for Pip to show him she is "not all stone" (368), a scene revealing a tender, emotional Miss Havisham, whose intentions toward Estella began as an urge to protect her from the broken heartedness she had known. She confirms Pip as the catalyst for her change, proclaiming "until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done" (371). Re-vision indeed. By scene's end, the once indomitable, heartless controller of Pip's fate lies burned with her white wedding dress falling off in black ashes, begging for his forgiveness. Pip's sense of order and nostalgia for essentialism have been destabilized, and he must come to terms with the fluidity of identity and class boundaries or be left forever haunted and seeking stability that does not exist.

Only when Pip's forced re-evaluation of others' identities causes him to re-evaluate his own does he embrace all the layers (grain and varnish) of his subjectivity. This process begins with the realization that Magwitch is his benefactor and continues with various discoveries that alter his interpretations of others: Estella's heart cannot be melted, Molly resembles Estella so strongly that she must be her mother, Magwitch is Estella's father. Magwitch's return sets all these disruptions into motion, and his death provides the stimulus through which Pip accepts the plurality of his own identity. In a moment, sitting beside the dying Magwitch, Pip understands that his class position will once again shift: Magwitch's "possessions would be forfeited to the Crown," and Pip will go on to be "a clerk" at Herbert's business, yet Pip sees his place now as remaining beside the convict—"being as true to you as you have been to me" (*GE* 416). With his hand on Magwitch's heart, he recalls that he once "meant to desert him" and now cannot think of leaving his side; the death of Magwitch links the Pip who deserted Joe and would have deserted his benefactor, the Pip who first met the convict on the marshes, and the Pip who loves Estella, with the young man who now sits with his hands inside those of "a sinner" (428). Dickens punishes Pip and Magwitch for crossing class or legal boundaries (Magwitch with death and Pip with the loss of his "expectations"), while also transcending class labels and limits through two characters whose multiple positionalities fostered multiple interpretations.

Ever striving to reconcile the need to destabilize identity and class boundaries while affirming the middle-class need for stability, the novel offers endings for individual characters that both assert the fluidity of identity and uphold middle-class notions that humanity is generally good and people ultimately get what they deserve.¹⁵ Urged to rewrite the original ending by Bulwer Lytton, Dickens retains in both Estella's suffering—a hard life that eases readers' desire to have characters get what they deserve—but adds hope in the revision, a final line where Pip sees "no shadow of another parting from her" (*GE* 451). Conscious of readers' expectations of justice and hope, Dickens also retained the instability of character in both endings: in each, the long-separated pair meet on the grounds where Satis House once stood, and in both versions Estella is able to revise the effects of Miss Havisham's teaching, to use her suffering to re-see "what [Pip's] heart used to be." Child-selves haunt the narrative for the last time as Pip and Estella compare

¹⁵ Kaplan claims that Dickens acted out "personal myths that energized him, the restless hero whose wounds and afflictions provoked the creative energy for noble acts. For the larger audience of Victorian culture, he was affirming what the middle and upper-class public had established as self-defining: that human nature was basically good, that the English gentleman could triumph over any adversity, that the morbid voices of degradation could be dismissed"—in short that those feelings of inadequacy could be overcome (359).

what they thought and felt at Satis House with their current understanding, using present and past dialogue to clarify subjectivity. Most important, the two endings (which are both printed in most editions) and the ambiguity of the couple's future invoke that familiar, unstable textual space where identities refuse closure and essentialist notions of identity demand examination.¹⁶

Great Expectations's narrative structure and characterizations reveal passing as both a deliberate deceit and a natural revision of identities—a process increasingly common in the socially-mobile nineteenth century. Dickens examines the complexity of shifting class positionalities and the hidden injuries of a working-class background while internalizing middle-class values. The only way to deal with the specter of class, for him, is to embrace all versions of one's identity; this he did through his literary characters and theatrical performances, working out identity conflicts by negotiating fluid boundaries and the nostalgic longing for some stabilizing, essential truth.

Cardinal Stritch University

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¹⁶ This contrasts with Dickens's style of endings in other novels, such as *Hard Times* or *Oliver Twist*, where each character's future is carefully outlined.

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“BLANK EPOCHS”: NARRATIVES OF DISABILITY IN
CHARLES DICKENS'S *THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP* AND
DINAH MULOCK CRAIK'S *JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN*

BY HELEN WILLIAMS

Aside from their signature sentimentality, Dinah Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* might not seem the most obvious comparison with Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*; yet a study of the two highlights the issues and challenges of depicting characters with disabilities and provides insight into how Victorians articulated notions of the disabled body. The strong didacticism of Craik's novel and virtuous morality of its characters distances it from the darker qualities of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, with its array of grotesque and disturbing figures; yet disabled bodies in both are described in surprisingly similar ways. Both novels feature a disabled narrator, Phineas Fletcher in *John Halifax, Gentleman* and Master Humphrey in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, each describing another disabled character—Muriel Halifax and Daniel Quilp, respectively, resulting in unusual narrative structures and thought-provoking representations of disabled bodies. A comparative analysis reveals Victorian modes of describing and discussing disability, the difficulties of representing disability, and the ways Dickens's writing interacted with and challenged those modes.

How do Craik and Dickens, as able-bodied writers, describe disability, either when writing as a disabled narrator or depicting other disabled characters in the text? What kind of language do these narrators use to talk about themselves, and what does this tell us about Victorian attitudes toward disability? These questions are organized around two pervasive constructs pertaining to disability: first, the premise that “the cripple is the creature who has been deprived of his ability to create a self” (Kriegel 33); and second, the belief that “the disabled are blessed or damned but never wholly human” (Gartner and Joe 2). Although these concepts stem from highly problematical, negative stereotypes, they provide a way of approaching particular elements of the texts and their articulations of disability that are specific to the period. Focusing first on *John Halifax, Gentleman* and then *The Old Curiosity Shop* in light of these points, this discussion explores both the problems disabled narrators face when describing their lives (or inability to create a self) and the model they employ to depict the “other” disabled body in the narrative. Examining what these ways of talking about disability signify highlights the challenges Dickens faced when writing about disabled bodies.

Martha Stoddard Holmes states that disability was a “recurrent interest” of Craik's and “central” to *John Halifax, Gentleman* (48). Narrated by John's disabled friend Phineas, the novel charts the rise of the orphan John Halifax from poverty to prosperity; although disabled characters feature prominently, readers learn little about Phineas or John's blind daughter Muriel. Phineas and Muriel are frequently defined by their differences from able-bodied characters or described in unrealistic, emotional terms, making the issue of disability seem elusive rather than “central.” Phineas's body and general appearance is particularly hard to pin down, conveyed not through descriptions of his own body but in relation to the highly detailed depiction of John's: “Everything in him seemed to indicate

that which I had not: his muscular limbs, his square, broad shoulders, his healthy cheek"; in contrast, Phineas refers to himself as a "puny wretch" (Craik 2). John's appearance is meticulously detailed: his "brown eyes, deep-sunken, with strongly-marked brows"; his lips "well-shaped, lying one upon the other, firm and close"; his "square, sharply outlined, resolute chin"; his "crisp curls of bright thick hair." Such detail contrasts with the lack of information regarding Phineas; it is not until the fifth chapter that we learn he has black hair and a pale complexion, and even this scant information is supplied by John (45). Such scarcity of detail makes Phineas difficult to picture: his body is rendered hazy and indistinct by language that evades direct description, and he appears as a curious void in the text, hinted at only through comparison with the able-bodied John. Significantly, it is John's voice that comes closest to giving a description of Phineas, and Phineas's reaction to the "catalogue of [his] qualities, internal and external" is startling (44). Claiming that "self-investigation is good," John lists his features, despite Phineas's plea that he not be "foolish." Phineas frequently corrects John, replacing "thin" with "a mere skeleton," and "pale" with "sallow," but such self-examination seems damaging. By partaking in a detailed description of his body, Phineas suddenly realizes, "clear as daylight," that John is the man he will never be; the moment culminates in physical, emotional, and narratorial disintegration: "I cannot describe what he was. I could not then. I only remember when I looked at him . . . my heart came up into my throat and choked me" (46). The narrative—like the narrator—breaks down, the descriptive game is abandoned, and Phineas's physical form reverts to a vague unmentionable in the text.

The notion that bodies can be lacking or incomplete in some way—echoing the vague, shapeless sense of Phineas's body—lingers under the surface of many of his descriptions of John, in relation both to his own physical appearance and to others. John is described as a "thorough boy" (Craik 18), which Phineas, by implication, is not; his "resolute chin" provides "character and determination to the whole physiognomy"—a quality which, when absent, suggests a "certain want" (2); and those lacking his "irrepressible smile" suggests "something unwholesome, blank, and cold" (19). Although the latter two examples are not explicitly related to Phineas or disability, it is notable that bodies here are divided along the axis of those with certain qualities and those without; rather than difference and variety, the language classifies physiognomy and form as either complete or incomplete. This dyadic cataloguing of bodies is echoed in the metaphors of reflection frequently used in relation to Phineas's existence: John, for Phineas, is a "reflection of the merry boyhood, the youth and strength that never were, never could be mine" (7), whereas Phineas describes his own youth as "colourless," with his memory having "nothing to do but to reflect and retain clear images of the lives around it" (19). Disability—or the "incomplete" body—here is something which cannot be described; instead of describing what qualities are present in the disabled body, the language used can only speak in terms of absences. "Blank," "colourless," perhaps "something unwholesome," the body that is lacking cannot be graphically depicted, distinct from John's thoroughly boyish golden curls, brown eyes, and strong chin. Phineas's physical form evades us, constantly consigned to the hazy peripheries and margins and distanced from John's wholesome figure.

As with his appearance, Phineas glosses over much of his daily life and even the nature of his disability itself. Discussing his diary from which the narrative originates, he alludes to "blank epochs" when either there is nothing to tell of John's life or he is too ill

to write: "these I shall not try to fill up" (Craik 19). Such blankness and absence indicate that Phineas's own life and struggles with his disability are not worth recounting. When Phineas, his father, and the doctor discuss the fact that he will never follow his father into the tanning business, the circumstances of his disability are neatly elided from the text—"there is no need to detail that interview"—and both father and son "tacitly covered over the pain, and referred to it no more" (47). After telling John "all" (another conversation not recounted to the reader), Phineas "drew the curtain over an inevitable grief, and laid it in the peaceful chamber of silence." The incident is excluded from the text on the premise that it is too painful to discuss, but an alternative view would be that it is simply easier—both for the character of Phineas and perhaps Craik's readers—not to scrutinize the lives and prospects of people with disabilities. A similar strategy is at work in Phineas's account of a protracted period of illness: describing it as "one of my seasons of excessive pain," he charts life in the sickroom, yet no details are offered as to the nature of his illness or the "pain" from which he suffers (19). Instead, Phineas talks of the "four gray-painted walls" that surround him, or the tedious passage of time, "where morning, noon, and night slipped wearily away, marked by no changes, save from daylight to candlelight, from candlelight to dawn," describing everything in the sickroom apart from the sick body within it. As Stoddard Holmes points out, in *A Christmas Carol* "while Dickens draws in detail the streets and interiors of Victorian London and even the abjection of many of its inhabitants, we don't know enough about [Tiny] Tim to ascertain whether his disability is the result of poor nutrition, a factory injury, or some other material cause" (2). Similarly, despite detailing the minutiae of John's life, the dramas of Phineas's life are passed over, being apparently either too upsetting or not sufficiently interesting to merit discussion. Even with the control of the story that comes with being the narrator, Phineas seems to act out the first of the aforementioned concepts, becoming the "cripple" who cannot create a self.

It is in his description of Muriel, however, that Phineas's narration employs a very different way of talking about disability. John's blind daughter Muriel is frequently treated as an otherworldly, almost ethereal being: Phineas refers to her as "better than Joy—she was an embodied Peace," her siblings describe her harpsichord playing as "talking to angels," and Lord Ravenel regards her as his "guardian angel—his patron saint" whose face is "half a child's and half an angel's" (Craik 205, 264, 271, 276). Muriel is a perfect example of the "blessed" disabled person; not quite human, her differences are represented in a positive rather than negative light. It is a way of reacting to disability, particularly blindness, which is thousands of years old: in ancient Egypt blind harpists were of an "elevated status" as it was believed that when playing their instruments they directly communicated with their god, and that their blindness itself was "derived from an encounter with the divine" (Barasch 3, 11). Charming as this concept is, in reality it can be seen as another method to make talking about disability easier; the real terms of Muriel's handicap are emotionalized in terms of "peace" and "angels." This correlates with Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's compensation model, a notion that "disability is a loss to be compensated for, rather than difference to be accommodated," and so Muriel's physical impairment is counteracted or compensated for by her special musical ability and ethereal qualities (49). This enables the text to describe disability without actually engaging with its deeper issues; the elevated terms remove it from the realm of everyday life, stressing the supposedly positive aspects of Muriel's disability and ignoring the

unspoken negatives. Stoddard Holmes comments that the frequency with which Victorian texts spoke of disability in this way created a “social identity for disabled people that was significantly defined in emotional terms” (4); interestingly, as narrator Phineas shies away from articulating his own experiences of disability, he finds it easy and almost reassuring to talk of Muriel’s disability in these emotional terms.

Significantly, Muriel exhibits the same reticence in speaking of her own disability as Phineas does; she worries on several occasions that her sister Maud will also be born blind but seems unable to articulate her impairment. After her mother Ursula misunderstands her question “will she be like me,” replying, “possibly; sisters often are alike,” Muriel responds, “No, I don’t mean like that; but—you know?” And Muriel touched her own eyes” (Craik 274). Later, when holding Maud for the first time she suddenly worries: “But these — touching her [Maud’s] eyes anxiously” (287), reluctant even to name her blindness. Actively articulating her own position as a blind person may not have been an option for Muriel, however. In an article on disability and life writing, G. Thomas Couser provides the interesting example of Georgina Kleege, who found that the process of writing her memoir, *Sight Unseen*, “crystallized her sense of herself as blind” and led to the “acquisition of a new identity” (232-33). Yet the identity assigned to Muriel is based on otherness and a blessed kind of existence; for her to create her own identity like Kleege and “crystallize” herself as physically impaired is problematic, if not unimaginable. Aligning herself with her disability as a form of identity in itself (rather than accepting the role of the blessed ethereal child) would disrupt the dominant model of disability as a state requiring compensation. Faced with this overly emotional register as the only way to speak of disability, both Phineas and Muriel lack a discourse whereby they can talk about their own issues in an autobiographical sense. Unable to define their own lives in the emotional terms used to describe the disabled other, they can only be defined as others choose to define them, rather than communicate their own identities as disabled people.

Muriel’s position in the text as a disabled female raises another major issue: the “contradiction between the ban on sexuality required by her disability and the cultural imperative for reproduction that would turn her into a mother, the only sanctioned role of female agency in sentimental fiction” (Klages 72). That various characters deny Muriel’s womanhood is shocking, particularly that of John—otherwise represented as a paragon of perfection. Discussing the future prospect of peace from war, Muriel asks John, “shall I be a woman then, father?”

He started. Somehow, she seemed so unlike an ordinary child, that while all the boys’ future was merrily planned out . . . none of us ever seemed to think of Muriel as a woman.

“Is Muriel anxious to be grown up? Is she not satisfied with being my little daughter always?”

“Always.” (Craik 248)

Not only is the family unable or unwilling to imagine Muriel as a grown woman, but they expect her to engage in their denial as well. John’s question as to whether Muriel is not satisfied with being his “little daughter always” is not only rhetorical—Muriel can really only agree—but demeaning: why should she be “satisfied” with such a restrictive outcome while “the boys’ future [is] merrily planned out”? The fact that Muriel sees herself as becoming a woman one day, as her question to her father suggests, implies that she does

not naturally assume as her family does that she should be any different from other girls. Elsewhere, John reacts to Ursula’s suggestion that Lord Ravenel could fall in love with Muriel with what seems an awkward mixture of shock, anger, humor and pity: “‘Hush!’ he said, as if Ursula’s fancy were profanity; then eagerly snatched it up and laughed, confessing how angry he should be if anybody dared to ‘fall in love’ with Muriel” (276). Interestingly, the disabled title character in Craik’s 1850 novel *Olive* grapples with the same concept, exhibiting a similarly disorientating tangle of emotions: Olive’s friend Sara, being teased by another girl about Olive’s friendship with Sara’s lover responds, “‘Jealous of Olive—how very comical!’ and the silver laugh was a little scornful. ‘To think of Olive’s stealing any girl’s lover! She, who will probably never have one in all her life—poor thing!’” (qtd. Stoddard Holmes 50). Although a much harsher reaction than John’s, the same incredulous mixture of shock and undertone of anger, followed by laughter and a patronizing pity, indicate that a disabled woman’s romantic involvement with an able-bodied man is unthinkable. Craik implies that such a response need not be automatic and alternative attitudes are possible, as Olive’s happy marriage illustrates. Nevertheless, Muriel seems to assimilate and accept the impossibility of her developing beyond her infantilized state. Lying in her bed following the accident with Lord Luxmore’s horse, she describes how she now finds the idea of being “busy about the house” like her mother “funny,” and admits “Oh! No, father, I couldn’t do it. I had better remain always your little Muriel, weak and small” (Craik 284). The phrase “always your little Muriel” echoes John’s earlier plea that she be his “little daughter always,” indicating this is an identity that has been forced on her, rather than one she has independently chosen. Klages sees Muriel’s death as “slow but inevitable” (72): physically unable to remain “little Muriel,” the only narrative path seemingly open to her is to die and assume a Peter Pan-like stasis—as Phineas describes, “always a child” (Craik 303).

Muriel then, as the half-angel, half-child, is doomed from the beginning, not only because she is a disabled female but also because she is continually presented as not quite human. It seems easier for the blessed disabled child to die, passing into a world with which she has been aligned throughout: the alternative, whereby Muriel outgrows her child-like state, would presumably raise such complex issues as to make a conventional happy ending difficult. Equally interesting is Phineas’s fate: his disability mysteriously recedes from the story and “his role is reduced to that of observer” (Klages 67). The text’s conclusion fairly eliminates him from his own narrative, ending as John and Ursula die, without recording his own thoughts or feelings—Phineas’s narrative ends with John’s death. Klages sees Phineas’s role in the text as a positive one, describing Craik as introducing a “new conceptualization of disabled selfhood by showing [Phineas], not just as the object of Halifax’s compassion, but as an adult, defined as an emotional agent able to provide care for dependents,” an “empathic agency” representing a “model of disabled adulthood that does not rely on either economic production or sexual reproduction” (74). While Phineas grows into more than an “object” of John’s compassion, he is not portrayed as having a genuinely active role within John’s family unit. As the novel ends, the Halifax children are adults; even if Phineas’s strength is in his role as emotional agent, it is a position that is now defunct. He writes himself out of his own narrative, suggesting that his life after John is irrelevant, or not of interest to readers. As Stoddard Holmes notes,

“we do not wonder what Tiny Tim will do for a job when he grows up” (18), and a similar reticence in addressing the future of the disabled character appears to be present here, as any discussion of Phineas’s future is neatly sidestepped.

How, then, does Dickens tackle disability, and what patterns are apparent when contrasted with Craik’s writing? Initially appearing as part of the weekly miscellany *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* was introduced and narrated by Master Humphrey, a “misshapen, deformed old man” (*MHC* 7). Originally, the narrative was presented as a reminiscence of Master Humphrey’s encounter with Little Nell while walking in London one evening; thus it can in a sense be viewed as “autobiographical storytelling” (Glancy 56). While Master Humphrey ceases personally to relate the story after the third chapter, it is significant that, when first published as part of the miscellany, the narrative continued through the construct of Master Humphrey’s weekly meeting with his friends—the story itself even featured “Personal Adventures of Master Humphrey” as part of the original title.

Like *John Halifax, Gentleman*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* features a disabled character as narrator who, compared with Phineas, appears to propose a greater degree of transparency about his life. Master Humphrey wishes his readers to know that he is “misshapen” and “deformed” so that he may not “make acquaintance . . . under false pretences” (*MHC* 7), but despite the promise to speak openly of himself, Master Humphrey only does so, like Phineas, by describing others. His neighbours were “curious to know who I was, and whence I came, and why I lived so much alone”; they suspect he is a “spy, an infidel, a conjurer, a kidnapper of children, a refugee, a priest, a monster” (6). While such passages are merely a diversion, leaving readers as uninformed as the neighbours, one of the few instances where he provides insight into his past—a recollection of himself and a group of children viewing a picture of “infant angels”—is similarly oblique (8-9). Wondering, as he compares each of his friends to a figure in the picture, “which was most like me,” it is overwhelmingly the reactions of the others that are conveyed. That he has no recognizable counterpart renders him “red and hot”; the others exchange looks, “crowding round to kiss me, saying that they loved me all the same” (9). He recalls the “old sorrow” in his mother’s “mild and tender look” and the revelation of how “keenly she had felt for her poor crippled boy.” Although there is one further autobiographical detail, of the dreams Humphrey had as a child involving a “fairy change” to his form, the reminiscence abruptly ceases, with a bracing “Well, well,—all these sorrows are past.” As disabled narrator, Master Humphrey avoids giving any real insight into his potentially interesting past—insisting, for example, that “what wound I sought to heal, what sorrow to forget, originally, matters not” (5)—instead laying his grief, like Phineas, in a “peaceful chamber of silence” (*Craik* 47). That Master Humphrey then withdraws from the narrative altogether places him in the same category as Phineas, a “cripple” lacking the ability to create a self. Interestingly, he then narrates the second construct of disability in Gartner and Joe’s typology through his depiction of the disabled dwarf, Daniel Quilp.

If Muriel Halifax typifies the blessed disabled, Quilp is the binary opposite. Monstrous in appearance and personality, he embodies the demonic disabled, a relative of such literary characters as Shakespeare’s Richard III or Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*. Employing a mixture of grotesquely magical and demonic terminology, Master Humphrey describes him as “quite horrible, with his monstrous head and little body”; his actions are “something

fantastic” and he wears the “stealthy look” of an “imp” (*OCS* 32). Representing his inner lack of physical and moral wellbeing, his complexion “never looks clean or wholesome” (29); interestingly, similar terms to those used in *John Halifax, Gentleman* resurface here, which situate the disabled body as somehow incomplete or “something unwholesome” (*Craik* 19). Here, too, the same method that Phineas uses in describing Muriel emerges: relying on descriptions of others to talk of his own disabled life, the language Humphrey uses to describe Quilp is rooted in a predominantly emotional response, with the disabled other as inhuman and—in this instance—monstrous.

Quilp, the demonic disabled incarnate, appears almost super-human, endowed with extraordinary abilities. He terrorizes Mrs. Quilp and her mother with his apparent omniscience and omnipresence, leaving them to doubt whether he is in fact human; he routinely defies various laws of biology, consuming copious amounts of boiling water (*OCS* 47, 465), residing happily in smoke-filled rooms (92, 380), and even appearing to rise from the dead (373). Both Quilp and Muriel are depicted as immune to normal illnesses—not only does the “sickness of infancy” pass Muriel by (*Craik* 206), but she survives exposure to smallpox (260); whereas Mrs. Jiniwin grumbles of Quilp: “nothing much was ever the matter with him—as ill weeds were sure to thrive” (*OCS* 37). The impressive list of Quilp’s jobs (rent-collector, money-lender, smuggler, and ship-breaker with shares in trade [35]) makes him appear hyper-masculine compared with such characters as Phineas, a point reinforced by reports of Quilp’s strange sexual allure. Mrs. Quilp makes the curious claim that “Quilp could marry anybody he pleased . . . the best-looking woman here couldn’t refuse him” (38), and it seems that Quilp’s sexual voracity is a necessary part of his strange powers of intimidation—his lascivious behaviour towards Nell, for example. Crucially, as Tobin Siebers notes, “it is only by appearing oversexed that the disabled man appears to be sexed at all,” suggesting that this aspect of Quilp’s behavior ties in with his hyper-masculine act, to resist being labelled as the kind of effeminate disabled man that Phineas typifies (175).

Much of Quilp’s behavior takes the form of an act, an exaggerated, grotesque performance of his misshapen features amplified at will; he revels in his unnatural habits and appearance and in frightening others for his own benefit or entertainment. His long-suffering mother-in-law, Mrs. Jiniwin, is often the target of such performances and is suitably unnerved by them. Shaking her fist at his back as he adjusts his necktie in the mirror, she happens to catch his eye: the “same glance” conveys to her Quilp’s reflection, “a horribly grotesque and distorted face with the tongue lolling out,” which morphs in an instant to “a perfectly bland and placid look” as he turns from the mirror towards her (*OCS* 47). Quilp’s face-pulling is for show, but its origins in the distorted appearance of his form and features blur the lines between performance and reality; he may only “appear” to be a “little fiend,” but Mrs. Jiniwin is genuinely frightened, “too much afraid of him to utter a single word.” Breakfasting with his wife and mother-in-law, he continues to develop the “impression” he has produced, devouring “hard eggs, shell and all,” “gigantic prawns with the heads and tails on” and drinking “boiling tea,” leaving them “nearly frightened out of their wits.” It is not only women he favors with such performances; Sampson Brass frequently suffers from being forced to match Quilp’s excessive smoking (“Quilp looked at his legal adviser, and seeing that he was winking very much in the anguish of his pipe . . . rubbed his hands with glee” [92]) or excessive

drinking ("Sampson took a few short sips of the liquor, which immediately distilled itself into burning tears" [466]). Even Dick Swiveller exclaims of the drink Quilp gives him: "why, man, you don't mean to tell me that you drink such fire as this?" (168).

There is more to Quilp's behavior than mere intimidation and personal satisfaction however, as many of his acts—comic enjoyment of violence, distorted face-pulling in the mirror or consumption of "fire"—evoke puppet shows and circus acts. As Sue Zemka notes, "commentators on *The Old Curiosity Shop* have frequently noted similarities between Quilp, the novel's chief villain, and 'Punch' and indeed the two are closely aligned through Quilp's deranged behaviour or the various illustrations in the text depicting the upper half of his body popping out of windows, mirroring the appearance of the puppet show" (294). A particularly clear connection is made between the two figures when a description of the limp Punch puppet owned by Codlin and Short (puppeteers Nell and her grandfather meet on their travels) bears a striking resemblance to an earlier image of Quilp, asleep and hanging out of his bed. Little Nell finds Quilp

hanging so far out of bed that he almost seemed to be standing on his head, and who, either from the uneasiness of this posture or in one of his agreeable habits, was gasping and growling with his mouth wide open, and the whites (or rather the dirty yellows) of his eyes distinctly visible. (*OCS* 103)

Subsequently, Nell and her grandfather observe Codlin and Short's Punch puppet, "perched cross-legged on a tombstone," his "nose and chin as hooked and his face as beaming as usual," in a strangely familiar posture:

he preserved his usual equable smile notwithstanding that his body was dangling in a most uncomfortable position, all loose and limp and shapeless, while his long peaked cap, unequally balanced against his exceedingly slight legs, threatened every instant to bring him toppling down. (129)

Both figures are comfortable in the most uncomfortable of positions: Quilp's open mouth replicates the "ghastly smile" he normally exhibits (29), while Punch's face is "beaming as usual," displaying his "usual equable smile." That Quilp also sleeps with his eyes open further connects him to the image of the puppet, with Punch's animated face contrasting with his static, inanimate position. For both, faces and features blur the boundaries between awake and asleep, animate and inanimate, emphasizing the implied connection between them.

This connection also alludes to the alternative life that a deformed dwarf such as Quilp might be entrapped by—the world of entertainments and freak shows. The plight of "freaks" such as giants and dwarves is discussed in a conversation Codlin and Short have with Vuffin and Sweet William, travellers resting at the Jolly Sandboys pub. Vuffin, the "proprietor of a giant, and a little lady without legs or arms," talks about the qualities of such people in a decidedly mercenary way, claiming that once a giant is "shaky on his legs . . . the public care no more about him," and that "the older a dwarf is, the better worth he is" (*OCS* 150-51). Quilp's proximity to such an existence is also hinted at with Kit's pronouncement that he is "an uglier dwarf than can be seen anywhere for a penny" (55). Little Nell's reaction to him, a mixture of fear and amusement, reinforces his tenuous position on the edge of becoming a freak-show figure to be laughed at: "while she

entertained some fear and distrust of the little man, she was much inclined to laugh at his uncouth appearance and grotesque attitude." In order to defy the able-bodied men seeking to exploit him, Quilp utilizes the horror of his disabled body to manipulate and control those around him, making money out of people as they would wish to make money out of him. Kriegel's analysis of Captain Ahab offers a useful comparison:

He is demonic because . . . he must now spend his remaining life resisting categorization. His existence is predicated on the need to not become what he believes the world demands he become. As a result, he has no choice but to enact the role of the Demonic Cripple. (34)

Quilp aligns himself with Punch as a taunt to a mercenary world that he knows cannot enslave him, increasing his monstrous and demonic behaviour to resist the categorization Kriegel describes. Ironically, however, it is only within the realm of his initial categorization as "demonic cripple" that he can do this—enacting the damned disabled is his only outlet, as there is no place for him to co-exist normally with such characters as Kit or Nell. It is a performance that simultaneously empowers and entraps him, a paradox echoed in Dickens's representation of Codlin's profession as puppeteer:

whereas he had been last night accosted by Mr. Punch as "master," and had by inference left the audience to understand that he maintained that individual for his own luxurious entertainment and delight, here he was, now, painfully walking beneath the burden of that same Punch's temple, and bearing it bodily upon his shoulders on a sultry day and along a dusty road. (*OCS* 138)

Quilp also appears as master of his own performances, yet it is a method of gaining power, or making money, which he ultimately cannot escape. Like the heavy weight Codlin bears "bodily upon his shoulders," Quilp bears an inescapable bodily load in his own misshapen and grotesque form. Although Dickens does not make this potentially negative aspect of his existence explicit—Quilp seems to enjoy the opportunities his appearance provides him—the association which is hinted at between Quilp and Punch suggests this is a type of performance which, poignantly, he cannot end, complicating the model of the "damned disabled" typology Quilp embodies.

Interestingly, Quilp also defies stereotypical notions of disability through sexual reproduction, as the Marchioness is commonly held to be Quilp and Sally Brass's illegitimate offspring. Gerald Grubb cites a cancelled passage in the original manuscript as "documentary evidence" of the Marchioness's parentage and, although Dickens ultimately removed the passage, sections such as Quilp's reaction upon meeting the girl infer that he is her father (163). The widespread preconception regarding such an act was that, as Siebers states, "what we are will be visited upon our children"; the Marchioness does indeed appear to be a fascinating, inverted double of Quilp (140). Her stunted growth is her most obvious alignment with him, although whether this is due to malnourishment or an inherited condition is not made clear; further, Sally Brass addresses her with the kind of epithets other characters normally reserve for Quilp, calling her "a little devil" (*OCS* 384). In fact, Brass's treatment of her exemplifies the sins of the father visited on the children: her withholding of food from the child mirrors Quilp's voracious consumption, the "hard blows" (279) Brass deals out are an echo of his unremitting and savage violence; and her imprisonment forces the Marchioness to peep through keyholes for "company" (430),

a practice Quilp engages in when spying. It is fitting that the Marchioness ultimately brings about Quilp's downfall by observing Brass's conversations from her lonely prison, engaging in an innocent version of his underhand habit, which eventually initiates justice.

Despite his various attempts to resist the labels assigned to his disability, Quilp's death is as inevitable as Muriel's; the only way to restore normalcy and provide a conventional ending is for the "demonic" villain to die. This exemplifies the challenges of ending a story involving disability and the limited range of denouements available. The final stage of a narrative featuring a "deviant" disabled body often uses one of four options, as described by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder: "an obliteration of the difference through a 'cure,' the rescue of the despised object from social censure, the extermination of the deviant as a purification of the social body, or the revaluation of an alternative mode of being" (53-54). Extermination and purification are the clear options here, as Quilp's death metaphorically and physically removes him from society; his death by drowning is not a "celebrated return to Mother Nature" but, as Vybar Cregan-Reid argues, a "vile and violent death" which leaves his body on the deserted mud-flats to bleach (82). Significantly, even in death he is situated at a distance from normal human existence: the accompanying illustration features "no life . . . no people, no ships, no houses," and his burial, "with a stake through his heart" (*OCS* 550) has positively vampyric associations (Cregan-Reid 85). To end his miscellany, Dickens also shows the demise of Master Humphrey who, "with a thoughtful smile upon his face, had died" (*MHC* 114). In this way, the lives of neither Quilp nor Master Humphrey resemble the uncertainty of Phineas's. As disabled characters whose impairments cannot be cured, limited options remain regarding the conclusion of their stories. As chief villain, Quilp's death is necessary, and Humphrey's peaceful, idealized death excuses Dickens from having to invent some sort of happy ending for the lonely, "misshapen" man. In this way, the awkward blankness surrounding the end of Phineas's story is averted, and readers can finish the text without having to consider the challenges faced by real disabled people as they try to negotiate their way through the world.

So far, this discussion has examined how characters narrate disability, their own and others', rather than analyzing why these authors represented disability in these particular ways. The conclusion, however, will seek to move beyond this in exploring what it was in Victorian culture that confined depictions of disability to such narrow representations. Interestingly, it appears that the discussion of disability in unrealistic emotionalized terms was so deeply entrenched in the Victorian consciousness that autobiographical writing by disabled Victorians employed the same tactics:

Victorians with physical disabilities habitually locate themselves in relation to melodramatic figurations of disability . . . all of these people display an engagement with the master narratives of "affliction" written by their larger culture . . . none . . . articulates his or her life "outside" these representations. (Stoddard Holmes 135)

The subtext of this passage is that this mode of discourse was one Victorians engaged with, but could—if they wished—override by describing their lives outside of the dominant cultural master narratives; yet it is quite possible that there was no alternative outside narrative available. What seems more likely is that a "realistic" mode of representing disability did not exist. For Craik and Dickens, no model was available for them to use

when writing in character as Phineas or Humphrey to articulate what it was to be a disabled Victorian—their characters can only struggle through attempts to define themselves, and then define others in terms of the "master narratives" that Stoddard Holmes describes. This inability to talk realistically of disability even stretched—unbelievably—to medical writing; in a piece for the *British Medical Journal* on dwarves published in 1891, George Humphry used the character of Quilp as an example to back up his assertion that there was a link between "the development of the intellectual, the moral, and the physical" (1188).

Writers' inability and reluctance to discuss disability openly was dictated by the tastes of a (mainly) able-bodied audience. As Stoddard Holmes notes, "conceptualizing all disabled people as one or the other allowed non-disabled people to enjoy unalloyed pity toward the innocent dependent, and unalloyed outrage toward the guilty dependent" (101). It provided a "safe" way for people to view disabled bodies and conventional channels by which they could attempt to understand them—without any further consideration of how shallow such channels might be—resulting in these repeated patterns of representation. As Wilkie Collins found nearly thirty years later, the public was still not ready to read about disabled characters that failed to conform with established stereotypes. A review of his 1872 novel *Poor Miss Finch*, which featured a sexually active, physically and financially independent blind woman, asserts readers "prefer the work of art that suggests to us bright impressions and graceful fancies" (qtd. Stoddard Holmes 91). The hard reality behind such "graceful fancies" was set to remain what Stoddard Holmes aptly calls "the unimaginable middle" (95); despite the attempts of such writers as Craik, Dickens, and Collins, the disabled figure in Victorian literature remained without an openly articulated, autobiographical self, as representations of the disabled "other" sat firmly on the spectrum of the blessed and damned.

The typologies of disability established by these texts are important for the ways they preserve notions about disability from a certain point in time. Quilp's monstrous spectacles and Phineas's vague endings represent the "vicarious experience of a previous culture's uncertainty about its disabled population" (Mitchell and Snyder 36). Indeed, it is the very narrative absence of Phineas's body and Master Humphrey's hidden past that highlights Victorians' depiction—or rather, elision—of disability. That Craik and Dickens were forced to obscure their descriptions of Phineas and Master Humphrey by detailing everything but the experience of being disabled reveals more about representations of disability than clear cut, realistic articulations. Interestingly, however, Dickens's depiction of the "damned disabled" character of Quilp is similarly revealing, being more complex than Craik's blessed Muriel. This discussion has indicated areas in which the subtext to Quilp's performances suggests an interpretation that strains against the boundaries of the typology that Quilp personifies, complicating his stereotypical representation and indicating the problems inherent in understanding disability in this way—yet tellingly, his character is still overtly delineated in terms of this master narrative. Placing Craik's work alongside that of Dickens highlights the ways the latter participates in, questions, and responds to dominant cultural representations of disability as practiced during the Victorian era.

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"ANOTHER THING NEEDFUL":
A NEW DIRECTION IN **HARD TIMES** CRITICISM AND PEDAGOGY

BY KATHARYN STOBER

The jury has ruled; the case is settled. *Hard Times* (1854) utterly devalues industry and utilitarian thought in favor of Fancy, Dickens's term for artistic imagination, creativity, and wonder. Much Victorian scholarship, both critical and pedagogical, agrees that these are the facts, facts, nothing but facts. But is Dickens's meaning really this simple and, quite frankly, un-fanciful? David Sonstroem argues that the "key" of the novel "lies in the cause that it champions: Fancy," while "the villain of the piece" is Facts; readers readily "appreciate the destructiveness of Fact and its practitioners" (520, 523). The Fancy/good, Fact/bad binary seems relatively straightforward, and it is tempting to accept this popular dogma unquestioningly, as many scholars have;¹ yet an alternative reading reveals a complex gray area wherein Fact and Fancy seemed enmeshed and, at times, indistinguishable from one another. The "destructiveness of Fact" is ever present, but so too is the destructiveness of Fancy; and, while Dickens does illustrate the consequences of rejecting fancy, he also demonstrates that fancy, a necessary mode of sporadic emotional relief from monotony (the mindless grind of factory labor, for instance) cannot be independently self-sustaining in an increasingly industrialized society. Dickens does not promote fancy over industry but rather advocates a sensible balance by demonstrating the interdependency of the two. This discussion examines first, how suppressed fancy leads to the moral destruction of Mrs. Sparsit, Bounderby, and the personified Coketown factories; and second, how unrestrained fancy causes a similar decline in Nature and Sleary's Circus.² Only by ignoring the fanciful destruction of the latter and the dormant, latent fancy of the former have critics been able to promote the prevailing fancy-over-fact argument.

Contrary to the surface impression that Mrs. Sparsit and Bounderby are without fancy, they do indeed possess the Dickensian "light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nature, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (or woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished" (Dickens, "Preliminary" 1). Since Mrs. Sparsit and Bounderby cannot extinguish this innate fancy, they misappropriate it to fit their hypocritical self-narratives. Although many characters in *Hard Times* find their fancy dulled to a "sullen glare"—either through principle, as with Gradgrind, or through resignation, as with Louisa—only in Mrs. Sparsit and Bounderby does repressed fancy cause moral destruction.

Dickens spares Gradgrind and Louisa from this moral destruction by allowing them to experience a catharsis of fancy; as Louisa reasons, "all closely imprisoned forces rend

¹ See Christopher Barnes, Ake Bergvall, Patrick Brantlinger, Phillip Collins, Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, Thomas Linehan, Mitsuharu Matsuoka, Elaine Ostry, Kit Polga and Paul Schacht. Cliffs Notes, students' favorite substitute for reading, offers this synopsis: "While the schoolroom dehumanizes the little scholars, the circus, all fancy and love, restores humanity." (http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/literature/hard-times/critical-essays/dickens-philosophy-style.html).

² Like Coketown itself, Nature is personified; offering a temporary escape from industrialism, it also conceals the dangers of a post-industrial landscape, dramatized by the fate of Stephen Blackpool.

and destroy. The air that would be healthful to the earth, the water that would enrich it, the heat that would ripen it, tear it when caged up" (*HT* 169). Fancy indeed qualifies as a "closely imprisoned force" in Mrs. Sparsit and Bounderby, whose characterizations align with such mythological and fanciful allusions as the knight-and-damsel metaphor: "If Bounderby had been a Conqueror, and Mrs. Sparsit a captive Princess . . . he could not have made a greater flourish with her than he habitually did" (36). While to observers Mrs. Sparsit's sewing habits "suggested . . . the idea of a hawk engaged upon the eyes of a tough little bird" (81) rather than gentle domesticity, this "Bank Dragon keeping watch over the treasures of the mine . . . considered herself . . . the Bank Fairy" (87). The words "suggested," "considered," and "regarded" indicate that her fancy is still dormant, not yet manifested but implied; yet she has progressed, taking a more active role in her moral destruction. She is no longer a passive and hypothetical damsel in distress; she is now *regarded* as an active dragon. Dickens shifts from syntactical hints about Mrs. Sparsit's dormant fancy to factual assertions:

She was a most wonderful woman for prowling about the house. How she got from story to story [sic] was a mystery beyond solution. . . . She would shoot with consummate velocity from the roof to the hall, yet would be in full possession of her breath and dignity on the moment of her arrival there. Neither was she ever seen by human vision to go at a great pace. (146)

That she is "a mystery beyond solution" and defies "human vision" fosters an overtly vampiric image of Mrs. Sparsit; from suggesting fancy to assuming fancy, Dickens states information factually rather than metaphorically. When she "drew herself up, and stood behind a tree, like Robinson Crusoe" (159), her associations with fancy are replaced by direct comparison: Mrs. Sparsit is not "suggested," or hinted, she is "like."

By the end of the novel, Mrs. Sparsit's fancy is at its most acute when Tom Gradgrind ponders: "Who could have been reduced to sudden extremity for the company of that griffin!" (*HT* 171). No longer "like" a fancy, she has completed her journey—transforming from hypothetical princess to suggested dragon, and from assumed specter to *like* Robinson Crusoe, and finally *is* "that griffin." Her smothered fancy is no longer suggested or implied; it *is*, a process revealing her malevolence as well as her dormant fancy (which she consciously misappropriates in order to undermine Bounderby's domestic dominance). As a result, she is denied the Gradgrinds's fanciful catharsis; as Thomas Linehan argues, her malice "owes nothing to any aspect of Gradgrind's thought or Bounderby's practice. Much to her own disadvantage, she helps unmake the self-made man, but nothing in her character illustrates the nature or effect of any system" (34).

Josiah Bounderby increasingly misuses fancy as the narrative progresses, also leading to self-destruction. This hypothetical rescuing knight uses his hat "as if it were a tambourine" and "like an oriental dancer, put his tambourine on his head" (*HT* 140-41); "in a bull-headed blundering way . . . [he] sighed like some large sea-animal" (142). The expressions "as if" and "like" demonstrate that, like Mrs. Sparsit, Bounderby's fancy is not yet fully established. He thinks in mythological terms: "If Romulus and Remus could wait, Josiah Bounderby can wait" (153); he, "in a bullying vein of public zeal, might play a Roman part" (207), regarding himself "a commercial wonder more admirable than Venus, who had risen out of the mud instead of the sea" (184). Such similes and

hypothetical situations shift to direct comparisons, while fanciful terms and select modifiers reveal him to be an autobiographical fraud. Whereas Mrs. Sparsit's intensifying fancy makes her increasingly aggressive, Bounderby's reveals him as increasingly false; he progresses from a theoretical conqueror, to "like" a dancer-artist, to an actor—a falsifier of identity, a fake persona. He misappropriates his inner fancy, thus committing a Dickensian moral sin on two counts: he falsifies his autobiography, and he uses it as a weapon against honest workers. Rather than embrace his rags-to-riches Fairy Tale, Bounderby devalues it by proposing that anyone can pull the sword from the stone with the right attitude. For both, the punishment—loneliness and regret—is appropriate to the sin: Mrs. Sparsit ends up "gobbling her insufficient income down by about the middle of every quarter, in a mean little airless lodging, a mere closet for one" (220); and Bounderby dies "of a fit in the Coketown street" (221). In contrast, Gradgrind continued to make "his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope, and Charity," having been permitted moral catharsis and penance.

Given the personification of industrial processes in *Hard Times*, suppressed fancy also appears in the geographical realm of Coketown and its factories, "where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in" (*HT* 51); yet Nature and Fancy seep subversively through the cracks despite best efforts to keep them out. This "forest of looms" (56) misappropriates nature: "The measured motion of [the looms'] shadows on the walls, was the substitute Coketown had to show for the shadows of rustling woods; while, for the summer hum of insects, it could offer, all the year round, from the dawn of Monday to the night of Saturday, the whirr of shafts and wheels" (86-87). But Dickens does not limit factories' links with fancy to Nature alone; he compares the town and its machinery successively to a savage, serpents, and an elephant (210-11)—images also associated with the circus.

Coketown's fanciful imagery becomes more concrete throughout the course of the narrative; in early morning, "the Fairy palaces burst into illumination," then belch "monstrous serpents of smoke trailing themselves over Coketown . . . and all the melancholy mad elephants, polished and oiled up for the day's monotony, were at their heavy exercise again" (*HT* 56). By removing all traces of human agency, Dickens associates Fairy palaces, serpents, and elephants with those who outwardly reject and misuse fancy. The tools of industry become the agents of their own destruction: "the Serpent was a Serpent of many coils, and the Elephant was getting ready" (64) to move. "Serpent" and "Elephant" emphasize factories' animalistic identity: "The smoke-serpents were indifferent who was lost or found, who turned out bad or good; the melancholy mad elephants, like the Hard Fact men, abated nothing of their set routine, whatever happened" (191). The factories thus complete their conversion from animal-like to animal; the serpents transform from monstrous to indifferent, and the elephants are melancholy as well as mad, mirroring the indifferent Bounderby and melancholy Mrs. Sparsit.

In the world of *Hard Times*, repressed fancy causes destruction; and, through Nature and circus imagery, Coketown's factories are syntactically overtaken by dormant fancy. But there is another perspective to consider: rural Nature and Sleary's Circus are similarly overtaken by dormant industry and commercialism. Through Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit, Dickens demonstrates the destructiveness of suppressed fancy; through Nature and Sleary's Circus, he indicates that unbridled fancy cannot sustain itself in an industrialized

society, and eventually must yield to, or cooperate with, industry. Although Dickens initially identifies each of these settings as “other,” ultimately neither exists independently of the other.

Ostensibly, the rural countryside offers a respite from industry, prompting Sissy Jupe and Rachel to use this “other” setting as a means to escape from Coketown: “it was customary for those who now and then thirsted for a draught of pure air . . . to get a few miles away by the railroad, and then begin their walk, or their lounge in the fields” (HT 197). Since Nature is physically separate from Coketown, it can be accessed only by railroad; thus industrialism extends beyond the physical limits of the urban sphere, and natural fancy is constrained by industrial technology. Despite this dependence, Nature makes a valiant effort to present a viable “other” from Coketown. At first, Nature physically overtakes Gradgrind’s schoolroom (thus resisting his philosophy as well) through a ray of sunlight which was “darting in at one of the bare windows of the intensely whitewashed room” (7). Sissy and Rachel encounter “larks singing (although it was Sunday),” but also industrial ruins: “a fence so rotten that it dropped at a touch of the foot” and “a wreck of bricks and beams overgrown with grass, marking the site of deserted works” (197-98). Even in decay industry prevails, consuming Stephen Blackpool, who falls into an abandoned mine; ironically, it is Nature’s fanciful rebellion, the overgrown grass, that conceals its presence in the landscape, thus making fancy equally responsible for Stephen’s fall. Adding insult to (literal) injury, Dickens demonstrates the necessity of industrial technology through the course of Stephen’s rescue. Industry, not fancy, pulls Stephen from the mine shaft; ropes and pulleys—not fairies and pixies—lift him out.

In an 1854 letter to Charles Knight, Dickens wrote:

I earnestly entreat your attention to the point (I have been working upon it, weeks past, in *Hard Times*). . . . The English are, so far as I know, the hardest-worked people on whom the sun shines. Be content if, in their wretched intervals of pleasure, they read for amusement and do no worse. They are born at the oar, and they live and die at it. Good God, what would we have of them! (*Letters* 7:294)

Dickens’s language—“wretched intervals of pleasure,” “hardest-working people,” and “born at the oar”—emphasizes England’s industrial imperialism, insinuating that, while work is difficult (and at times mind-numbing), each worker is but a cog in the great British machine. Despite his resistance to Gradgrindian extremism, Dickens perceives that Britain’s place as a world power depends upon this industrial collective. Fancy is essential but not at the expense of fact (or how would these workers be able to finance their “intervals of pleasure”?). Also, that this pleasing fancy occurs at “intervals” and not simultaneously with work promotes work and pleasure as separate spheres, suggesting that a Ruskinian amalgamation of both would hinder work and bastardize fancy—as is evident in Sleary’s Circus.

Like Nature, Sleary’s Circus represents a fanciful “other,” the antithesis of industrialism; yet it, too, must submit to capitalism. Appearing in the first and last numbers, episodes involving Sleary’s circus “bookend” the plot, shaping the novel’s internal narrative. Several critics³ cite the circus’s initial fancy, which immediately follows Gradgrind’s educational philosophy, as evidence that Dickens favors fancy over

³ See Mitsuharu Matsuoka, Anthony Giffone, Thomas M. Linehan, and Elaine Ostry.

industry; however, these critics have not taken into account the circus’s decreased fancy and increased commercialism in its last appearance as compared to its first appearance. From the first, Dickens labels the Circus inherently “other”; introducing the individual members of Sleary’s “family,” he terms Mr. Childers “the most remarkable sort of Centaur” and Master Kidderminster “so pleasing a Cupid as to constitute the chief delight of the maternal part of the spectators” (HT 26). In addition to these mythological allusions, the troupe lodges at the Pegasus’s Arms—doubly fanciful, as Pegasus had no arms—heraldic or otherwise: “The Pegasus’s legs might have been more to the purpose” (25). As Dickens posits, “in all familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough, if we will find it out” (“Preliminary” 1).

In addition to occupying a geographic “other” outside the limits of Coketown, Sleary’s Circus also occupies a philosophical “other” directly opposed to the Gradgrind school of thought:

There was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving often of as much respect, and always of as much generous construction, as the every-day virtues of any class of people in the world. (HT 31)

Several critics cite such passages in support of the argument for fancy over industry. For instance, Anthony Giffone claims that Dickens uses “the values embodied in the circus world as a philosophical alternative to the values of capitalism, industrialization, and utilitarianism” (396). But this considers only the actions and words of Sleary and his troupe rather than the motivations behind them; although the troupe displays a fanciful, non-Gradgrindian life, Sleary’s own philosophy presents a paradox. As Sleary tells Gradgrind, “People must be amuthed, Thquire, somehow . . . they can’t be alwayth a working, nor yet they can’t be alwayth a learning” (HT 35). Sleary may be attacking utilitarianism, but by expounding upon the necessity and utility of fancy, he uses a thoroughly utilitarian defence to do so.

Like Giffone, Christopher Barnes states that the circus “stages itself in opposition to and in spite of Gradgrindism and the demands of middle-class work discipline” (246). This theory would hold true if not for the portrayal of Sissy’s father, fashioned entirely through Sissy’s rose-colored vision: “Sissy Jupe, in saying of her father that ‘he belongs to the horse-riding’ . . . quite accurately presents him as engaged in an activity rather than a profession” (Sonstroem 522). The term is problematic: Sissy “presents” Jupe as a carefree and fanciful artist rather than a drudging laborer, yet young children are not the most reliable narrators. How much does Sissy understand about the business aspects of circus life? *Hard Times* directly belies Sissy’s assertion and thus vexes Sonstroem’s argument. When Gradgrind and Bounderby inquire as to why Sissy’s father has abandoned her, they are told:

“You may or you may not be aware . . . that Jupe has missed his tip very often lately. . . . Offered at the Garters four times last night, and never done ‘em once,” said Master Kidderminster. “Missed his tip at the banners, too, and was loose in his ponging.”

“Didn’t do what he ought to do. Was short in his leaps and bad in his tumbling,” Mr. Childers interpreted. (HT 27)

It is extremely telling that Jupe's failure was—not what he “usually does” or what he’s “capable of doing”—but what he “ought to do.” Childers's indication that this leaping, tumbling, and “ponging” was what he “ought to do” reveals that these feats do not represent artistic or athletic ability but rather a tedious job requirement. Jupe is not an independent artist but a worker ant in the Circus colony; he quits his profession and abandons his daughter not from nagging doubts about his parenting skills (or some exotic Dickensian reason like kidnapping, mistaken identity with an evil twin, or spontaneous combustion), but because he failed to perform his job. Dickens does not privilege fancy over industry, but he does present forced fancy as a type of industry. Through Jupe, Childers, and Kidderminster, Dickens indicates that the circus is not fancy for fancy's sake, and that even circus clowns must endure the commercial stress of routine job performance reviews.

In a letter to Peter Cunningham, Dickens wrote that *Hard Times* “localizes . . . a story which has a direct purpose in reference to the working people all over England” (*Letters* 7:291). The caveat “all over England” (not all over the world) emphasizes England's seemingly exclusive claim on industry in the nineteenth century. The novel “localizes” in two ways: by allowing Coketown to represent a microcosm of England, and by presenting England as a microcosm for problems and themes that are timeless and cross-cultural. That *Hard Times* has relevance to all working people is directly stated, but what remains hidden is Dickens's definition of “work.” Is it exclusively industrial or are its boundaries more tenuous? If “working people” are to be defined by the text of *Hard Times*, then certainly this story has a “direct purpose in reference” to the Slearys as well as the Gradgrinds of the world.

David Sonstroem concedes that the text “shows the circus to be another business” but adds that “the real difference between factory and circus is not that between labor and idleness . . . but rather that between self-seeking, exploiting management and kindly, paternalistic management” (525). Yet this ignores the circus's startlingly industrial turn at the end of the novel. Considering the many disadvantages of fancy Dickens presents over the course of *Hard Times*, it is no surprise that when Sleary's troupe reappears, its members have gained a morosely capitalistic sensibility—particularly “Cupid” himself, Master Kidderminster. When Sissy returns to the circus, she finds that Kidderminster has “grown too maturely turfy to be received by the wildest credulity as Cupid any more”:

[he has] yielded to the invincible force of circumstances (and his beard), and, in the capacity of a man who made himself generally useful, presided on this occasion over the exchequer—having also a drum in reserve, on which to expend his leisure moments and superfluous forces. In the extreme sharpness of his look out for base coin, Mr. Kidderminster, as at present situated, never saw anything but money; so Sissy passed him unrecognized. (*HT* 208)

Kidderminster succumbs to utilitarianism by making himself “generally useful” and to capitalism by pursuing “base coin”: his “drum in reserve” probably gets little use. His moral decline is equal to that of Mrs. Sparsit and Bounderby, although brought about by opposite means, implying that exclusive reliance on fancy can be as counter-productive and destructive as suppressing it. Only through peaceful co-existence and balance of fancy and industry is success possible in Dickens's world. One must recognize and respect the necessity of each in balanced moderation to survive.

Only one character in *Hard Times* is able to personify this happy medium between the poles of industry and fancy: Sissy Jupe—who, because she knows both spheres, understands their interdependence:

happy Sissy's happy children loving her; all children loving her; she, grown learned in childish lore; thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised; trying hard to know her humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death. (*HT* 222)

Sissy understands that “machinery and reality” cannot be avoided but should co-exist with—not be replaced by—imagination and fancy, seen in her dual identity as circus member and Gradgrind pupil. She balances the two by carrying the circus's “model of family with her into Gradgrind's world” (Barnes 247); although she does not return vocationally to the circus, she synthesizes its philosophical sphere with the physical sphere of industrialized England. Sissy represents a combination of fancy and industry: Fancy, to be hopeful mentally and Fact, to be productive socio-culturally. Dickens's statement—“in a utilitarian age . . . it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected” (“Frauds” 168)—acknowledges that the age requires both fancy and fact; to Angela Burdett-Coutts he wrote: “I think [it] would amuse you . . . which is for a little more fancy among children and a little less fact” (*Letters* 7:148). Fancy here is meant to alleviate the stress of productive work and industry, not replace it; Dickens wishes only for “a little less fact,” not its obliteration or extinction. The “one thing needful” is to question any interpretation of *Hard Times* so uniform as to represent “nothing but Facts.”

University of North Texas

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Book Reviews

Pierre Coustillas, *The Heroic Life of George Gissing, Part 1: 1857-1888*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011. pp. x + 366. £60, \$99. Reviewed by M. D. Allen

One begins, of course, by reading the "Foreword and Acknowledgements," and one is immediately hooked, as one will remain for the next 350 pages (for even the endnotes compel, full as they are of fascinating minutiae.) The foreword represents, *en petit*, the autobiography of a finished scholar, a recounting of a life spent teaching in Paris, Madagascar, and Lille, spent too in what Coustillas calls a "passionate professional activity" [vii] the mere incidental accomplishments of which would have made the reputation of many a lesser scholar. Here, briefly noted, are the translations and editions of Conrad and Kipling, Hardy and Jack London. But, and we now approach the heart of Coustillas's achievement, here is the clear design, brought to triumphant fruition, of rescuing an unjustly neglected novelist from obscurity by prolonged work in literary criticism and biographical research, by sustained editorial and bibliographical endeavors, and by topographical investigation.

Many writers have their academic or critical champions but few can owe so much to one scholar as George Gissing owes to Pierre Coustillas. When Coustillas began seriously publishing on Gissing in the mid-1960s the Victorian novelist was generally regarded as stalely, stodgily, and irremediably of the second or third rank with only one fully achieved work to his name, namely *New Grub Street* (1891). Few researched or wrote on him, and when the first issue of *The Gissing Newsletter* appeared in January 1965 its tone was oddly apologetic: "Most of us do not believe that he is amongst the greatest writers or the greater men. But we have noticed that his readers are often willing to grant him a degree of attention, even enthusiasm, that they acknowledge to be out of proportion to his literary achievements." "We" was an editorial board consisting of Shigeru Koike, Herbert Rosengarten, Pierre Coustillas, who has the distinction of having written the *Newsletter's* very first article ("In Gissing's Footsteps, 1" an account of its author's search for some of Gissing's English residences that charmingly included the reaction of a francophobic householder: "Go out, go out!"), and Jacob Korg, editor until 1969 and author of the lines quoted above. But since then *The Gissing Journal*, so renamed in 1991, has become a respected academic quarterly; the Harvester Press has produced scholarly editions of most of the novels, ten edited by Coustillas, and of Gissing's diary, *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, again edited by Coustillas; Ohio University Press has published an award-winning edition of the collected letters in nine volumes with Coustillas as one of the three editors; Rivendale Press has issued a magisterial primary bibliography, once again the work of Coustillas. And we now have the first volume of his long awaited biography, in the introduction to which Coustillas can proclaim that "the flow of comment and new publications about [Gissing] and his works now surpasses in bulk the amount devoted to most other Victorian novelists, with the sole exceptions of Dickens and Hardy" (1).

The foreword is followed by eight cautious, careful, and meticulous chapters, which constitute the book's two parts, "Hopes Destroyed" and "Hard Times." In the first, Coustillas establishes in authoritative detail the secure happiness of Gissing's first thirteen years until the devastating death of his father in 1870. Gissing was never close to his mother or siblings (although Ellen, the younger sister, would write of him after his death with tenderness and

respect) but in his father, an impressive man of humble origins who did much for his adoptive town of Wakefield, he saw simple goodness and a commitment to intellectual, especially literary, pursuits that appealed deeply to his own insatiable desire for learning. Gissing would also note and largely adopt his father's political views, including a rooted pacifism. A strong case could be made that many of his later disasters, especially the early one that is best known and which helped bring about the others, resulted in part from the disorientating blow of his father's death. Perhaps the father who lovingly wrote on receipt of a letter from George "You know how pleased I always am to see a letter from *you* to *me*, therefore I need say no more about *that*" (40-41) could have steered his son through the shoals of adolescent sexuality, pity, and social indignation that shipwrecked his career. As it was, Morley Roberts, in his fictionalized biography of Gissing, *The Private Life of Henry Mailland* (1912), could justly put into his subject's mouth the lament that "It was a cruel and most undesirable thing that I, at the age of [eighteen], should have been turned loose in a big city, compelled to live alone in lodgings, with nobody interested in me but those at the college" (qtd. 81).

The results of Mrs. Gissing's forgivable overestimation of her first child's emotional maturity, combined with her equally pardonable ignorance of how little oversight he experienced, are now the stuff of literary legend. Gissing fell in love with Marianne Helen Harrison, known as Nell, already drinking too much and accepting money in return for sexual favors. He gave her what he could and stole from his fellow students when that ran out. Eventually caught and sentenced to a month's imprisonment with hard labor, he was then shipped out to the US to start a new life. The Oxbridge, or redbrick, classics don was never to be but the successful American high school teacher of English provenance, or the now-American literary journalist, or even the transplanted American novelist was never to be either. Despite enjoying, at least at first, some aspects of life in the US, Gissing was still writing to, and receiving plaintive letters from, Nell. This period in his life is revealingly fleshed out by Coustillas's discovery of a previously unknown draft of a letter to him from his former headmaster, who was familiar with the efforts made, and money spent, in order to give his former charge a new start. It was written in response to Gissing's ill-considered request that Nell be sent out to him if he would pay her fare. Gissing, fortunately in view of the severity of the strictures passed upon him ("You are—by every feeling of honour, gratitude and common sense—bound to make some sacrifice for others *before* proceeding in your own scheme of self-gratification" [112]) probably did not get this letter before he abruptly ran away from the Massachusetts town in which he was teaching, to avoid falling more deeply in love with one of his students. His subsequent desperate writing of short stories and his living on peanuts are familiar to readers of *New Grub Street*, where they are represented as the adventures of the amiable Whelpdale.

It is the last five chapters of the book that justify Coustillas's choice of title. After about a year in the US, Gissing returned to London and set out to make a reputation for himself as a novelist. He had no money or contacts and was encumbered by a served prison sentence. Worse than that, in the face of grasping, or lying, or cowardly publishers, he was encumbered by an extraordinary idealism, or naïveté. In the course of the nine years or so between his return to England in 1877 and the modest success of *Demos* (1886), his constant labor would result in the publication of three novels. We read of one work rejected in 1878 ("Just what I expected. . . The next must be better," bravely wrote its creator [qtd. 137]). *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) had to be issued at Gissing's expense but even so its publishers asked him to cut its length by half, a request he refused. *The Unclassed* appeared in 1884 and *Demos* in 1886. Another work, *Mrs. Grundy's Enemies*, was accepted for publication by George Bentley, who then dithered

about actually bringing it out, due to content the nature of which is doubtless suggested by the book's title. The novel has been lost. Coustillas devotes a good part of a whole chapter to its history and the frustrations its author was made to undergo ("Defying Mrs. Grundy [September 1882-June 1884]"). He well writes that "Where many other aspirants to literary recognition would have given in, he pursued with occasional curses and protests the efforts which made of him eventually one of the sharpest critics of English society of his day" (229).

Nor was Gissing permitted to endure these professional travails with the support of a loving and stable wife, thankful for the tremendous sacrifices he had made on her behalf. He and Nell probably lived together from early 1878, and Coustillas plausibly hypothesizes that the early times were not without gratitude on Nell's part and happiness for them both. But even at the beginning she sought the companionship of "gossiping busybodies." So "Quarrels and drinking frequently followed and removals were a means of fending off danger for a few weeks or months" (138). (In this regard, certain scenes in *Workers in the Dawn* read like simple transcriptions of what Gissing essayed, heard, and saw.) Coustillas's reader easily follows the disintegration of Nell's health and the ups and downs of the relationship: by 1879 "Her company, her domestic incompetence, her partiality for drink were getting increasingly on his nerves" (143); but on 27 October, 1879 the two were married according to the rites of the Church of England, for reasons even Coustillas can only guess at (158); in 1880 she was "subject to frequent fits" (148); in July 1881 "she had entered St Bartholomew's Hospital in Smithfield with a large swelling in her cheek" (177). In early 1882 Nell would plot "with the servant against him and he had to lock her in to prevent her getting drunk" (195). By June of the same year, after a drunken disturbance involving the calling of a policeman, Gissing was writing that "I shall utterly and absolutely cease all relations, save sending a postal order each week" (199). After the inevitable final separation Gissing had some measure of peace at the price of the weekly alimony but only Nell's no less inevitable premature end, of alcohol poisoning and syphilis, made that peace, at least with regard to her, definitive.

Coustillas's volume ends with his subject on his way to Italy for the first time, on 26 September, 1888. Henceforth his novels will no longer deal with the benighted working class amongst whom he had been obliged to live during his first painful decade in London; they will deal, in a marked shift, with middle-class characters and their preoccupations. One closes the book wanting more. (The second volume, taking its subject from 1888 to 1897, is scheduled to be published in January 2012; the third, dealing with Gissing's life from 1889 to his death in 1903 and treating too of his posthumous, critical, life will appear in July of the same year.)

In discussing what critics have named the *American Notebook*, a collection of jottings and extracts from his reading that Gissing made during the sojourn of 1876-77, Coustillas writes that "The contents of this extraordinary notebook can best be compared to a maze in which the reader whose mind is saturated with all Gissing's works, letters and private papers easily spots numberless connections" (124). That Coustillas possesses such a mind no one will deny. Not only is that mind "saturated" with all extant Gissingiana but his knowledge of the author's life and the lives of those connected with him is peerless. But occasionally the reader struggles with superfluous details, the unnecessary, here, product of a ferociously exhaustive research: "[George and his brother Algernon] surely met that flighty creature Colonel George Halpin and perhaps some members of his family, the Misses Levy and a few of their musical friends, Edward Hussey, Dr. Alexander Macrae, Lady Barlow, doubtless also Josephine Agabeg, teacher of music and pianist, not to speak of David Gausson himself" (255). The last-named character is not without importance to the story; Colonel Halpin, the Misses Levy, and

Josephine Agabeg admittedly make other fleeting appearances in the narrative; but Hussey, Macrae, and Lady Barlow are mentioned here and here only, to the slight bemusement of the name-battered reader. (Coustillas doubtless has files on all three of them, probably fat ones.)

Finally, for some of us Gissing the writer fascinates and Gissing the man, endlessly decent in unfavorable circumstances, wins respect. But even devotees may think that Coustillas, for long the chief of our confraternity, can be a little astringent with those who admire neither the one nor the other as much as he does. He is indignant with "the least enlightened of his critics" who patronize Gissing, because "Only [those] who go beyond appearances and can push aside their mortarboards have a chance of doing him justice, for indeed his temperament fares badly at the hands of wiseacres" (2). The scholar of not inconsiderable achievement who disagrees with Coustillas about the authorship of certain short stories is briskly dealt with indeed (338, n. 30); and some biographers have passed "a low-brow and obscurantist judgement which betrays a failure to understand the uncomfortable position which [Gissing's] origins and superior capacities had placed him in" (174).

University of Wisconsin, Fox Valley

Saverio Tomaiuolo. *In Lady Audley's Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres*. Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. ISBN 978 0 7486 4115 4. 221 pp. \$105 cloth. Reviewed by Sophia Andres

By now, scholars of the sensation novel are quite familiar with just about every facet of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*. Yet Tomaiuolo casts a new light on the novel by contextualizing it within the genres which Braddon's amalgamates in this novel and further develops in her other works. Indeed the greatest strength of Tomaiuolo's work lies in the contextualization of Braddon's novels within primary historical and socio-political texts. The book is divided into three parts: Part I "Gothic Mutations" explores the influence on and subversion of the Gothic mode in Braddon's fiction; Part II "Darwinian Detections" discusses Darwinian theory in Braddon's detective novels; and Part III "Victorian Realism" interprets Braddon's realistic fiction within the context of British and French realism.

Part I opens with *Lady Audley's Secret*. Though the novel is replete with Gothic elements, it violates the structural and thematic devices of the Gothic by simultaneously domesticating it and complicating it. By replacing the male villain of the Gothic novel with the beautiful and delicate Helen Talboys/Lucy Graham, "both pursuer and pursued, persecutor and victim" and with the frail aristocrat Sir Michael Audley as well as the ineffectual barrister, reader of French novels, Robert Audley, Braddon undermines the Gothic mode. Tomaiuolo points to the "architectural irregularity" of Audley Court and "the presence of secret chambers," a Victorian country home which shares the features of medieval castles and becomes a new site of "transgression and penetration of the female other": "The isotopic reference to the serenity and peacefulness of Audley Court as former convent is an ironically proleptic narrative strategy which anticipates Lady Audley's criminal intents and, later, her incarceration in the Belgian asylum of Villebrumeuse" (26-27). In this chapter, Tomaiuolo discusses the Madhouse Act (1828), the Lunatics Act of 1845 and John Conolly's medical innovations discussed in *The*

Construction and Government of Lunatic Asylums (1847) which advocated the “performance of simple ordinary duties” rather than the physical restraint of mentally deranged people, especially of women (28).

Gothic settings in *John Marchmont's Legacy* become signifiers for dispossession, in particular women's exclusion from property rights, in this case Mary and Olivia's legal and emotional dispossession. On the other hand, Edward Arundel's traumatic experience and dispossession is related to the railway, the symbol of Victorian progress. In this chapter Tomaiuolo discusses the history of the railway, its connection with Victorian capitalism, and the anxieties of ecological violence it generated. “Edward's loss of memory testifies to Braddon's interest in dealing with the problematic interaction with the ‘commodified’ present represented by trains... Compared to a travelling ‘parcel’ Edward will have neither a real sentimental nor an economic ‘compensation’ for his trauma and sufferings” (53).

Chapter 3, “Reading between the (Blood)lines of Victorian Vampires: ‘Good Lady Ducaigne,’” updates vampiric Gothic themes through allusions to contemporary scientific debates and socio-cultural questions. Tomaiuolo discusses this story within the context of other vampiric stories as, for instance, Stoker's *Dracula* and Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, Marx's association between capitalist economy and vampirism, as well as medical studies on menstruation such as Dr. Edward Clarke's *Sex in Education* and James MacGrigor Allen's speech in the *Anthropological Review*, along with studies on the uses of chloroform and transfusion. “From a chronological point of view,” Tomaiuolo states, this story was published when debates “on degeneration—originating from the imperial fears of invasion which would largely inform *Dracula*—were widespread (66).

Part II, “Darwinian Detections” begins with *Henry Dunbar*. “[There] is nothing that English men and women enjoy more than the crime which they call ‘a really good murder’... Every man is at heart a Sherlock Holmes, while every woman thinks herself a criminal investigator by instinct” (80). Mary Braddon's statement, Tomaiuolo remarks, confirms the opinion of many contemporary critics that the sensation novel established some of the conditions for the birth of detective fiction. Criminology, the author demonstrates, often made illegitimate use of Darwinian notions of heredity. Lyell's deductive science in *Principles of Geology*, often “became the norm for the literary detective” (81). “By mixing the results of Lyell's ‘gradualist’ approach, the narrative strategies used by Chambers and Thomas Malthus's arguments in *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), Darwin offered in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) an interpretation of the natural world as a battlefield for the survival of species and for the acquisition of food” (82). While for Darwin it was the need for food that led creatures to fight with each other, for Braddon the need to “survive” and to rise on the social ladder motivates Helen Talbot's criminal actions (86). *Henry Dunbar* (1864) deals with professional and amateur detectives and double identities. Austin's and Robert Audley's attitudes are those of two imperfect Darwinian investigators, whose counter-detections conceal, rather than reveal, unspeakable secrets (92).

Eleanor's Victory (1863), one of the first novels to include a female detective as a leading character, whose investigation is motivated by a “stubborn search for truth, vengeance and justice. . . . The Parisian world surrounding Eleanor resembles a Darwinian ‘entangled bank’ seemingly devoid of any meaningful pattern and whose design can be given order only by the scientist/detective” (97, 100-101). The most original element in *The Trail of the Serpent* (1861) is not represented by its sensational plot but by its investigator, the dumb detective named Joseph Peters, portrayed as a liminal character because of his lowly social origin and his

physical disability. Here Tomaiuolo develops Braddon's ironic allusions in *The Trail of the Serpent* to Darwinian theory *On the Origin of the Species* and in *Monograph on the Sub-class Cirripedia, with Figures of All Species*. In this novel Braddon negates many post-Darwinian theories dealing with the “hereditariness” of evil, for the son of a hardened criminal becomes a successful detective. Though other Victorian novelists include a disabled character in their novels, Braddon differs in her characterization of Joseph Peters by avoiding the melodramatic mode (108).

Rough Justice (1898) is Braddon's “explicit tribute to the modern detective novel” (119). In this novel Braddon shows that “late-Victorian attempts to normalize cultural, moral, ideological and racial ‘otherness’ are the symptoms of *internal* discontents and fears” (121). Here Braddon undermines assumptions of the influence of the “corrupting colonies” (123). In *His Darling Son* photographic reproductions of the “characters' features are important elements in the detecting process” (127). Here Tomaiuolo shows the influence of Thomas Byrnes' *Professional Criminals of America*, Alphonse Bertillon's *The Identification of Criminal Cases by the Anthropometrical Method* and Francis Galton's *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*. In *His Darling Son*, Braddon “alternately shares and challenges traditional detection practices and detecting roles” (129).

Part III, “Victorian Realisms,” opens with a discussion of realism in realist and sensation novels. Sensation fiction, Tomaiuolo states, “contributed to the evolution and modernisation of the Victorian literary genres” (139). In the first chapter of this section the author returns to *Lady Audley's Secret* and discusses Braddon's use of letters and allusions to Pre-Raphaelite paintings as her attempts to intensify the sensational elements of her novel by grounding them into realism.

In the next chapter Tomaiuolo explores *The Doctor's Wife* as Braddon's realist novel that involves issues on novel writing and reading. Beginning with John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that warned of the dangers of reading, the author contextualizes this novel in Victorian debates on the effects of reading particularly on women. The author also discusses the relationship between “literary and photographic realism,” concentrating on Braddon's use of photographic paradigms.

The last chapter is devoted to *Phantom Fortune* “built on a series of chronological, topological, economic and socio-cultural dichotomies” (177). Braddon's dual chronological setting of the novel in the late thirties and the late seventies reveals her concern with cultural changes that occurred in the intervening decades. The “spectre of Communism” Marx evokes in the beginning of the *Manifesto*, Tomaiuolo believes, determines the literary and cultural context” of Braddon's *Phantom Fortune*. Commodities haunt the lives of the main characters in a specular way. The antithesis between May and Lesbia “dramatizes the ideological, social and economic transition from a naturalistic Romantic culture to a consumerist late-Victorian one...” (180).

No doubt, Tomaiuolo's work is wide ranging in its scope and inclusion of diverse Victorian historical and sociopolitical contexts demonstrating the evolution of Braddon's novel writing throughout her career and her keen awareness of the aesthetic and cultural changes that she represented in her novels, in most cases subverting mainstream values rather than endorsing them. Aside from its unique interpretations of Braddon's novels, this book is a valuable resource of Victorian social history and culture.

Books Received

- Flint, Kate, ed. *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012.
- Gold, Barri J. *ThermoPoetics: Energy in Victorian Literature and Science*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.
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Contributors

Maria K. Bachman is Chair and Professor of the Department of English at Coastal Carolina University. She is co-editor of *Fear, Loathing, and Victorian Xenophobia* (2013) and *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins* (2003); and she has edited scholarly editions of Collins's "The Dead Hand" and Dickens's "The Bride's Chamber" (2009), and Collins's *The Woman in White* (2006) and *Blind Love* (2004). Her current book project is *This is Your Brain on Books: Embodied Consciousness and the Novel*.

Silvana Colella is professor of English at the University of Macerata, in central Italy. She is author of *Il genere nel testo poetico* (1992), *Romanzo e disciplina* (1994) and *Economia e letteratura* (1999); English publications articles on the Malthusian plot in popular culture, Walter Scott, Fanny Burney, Anthony Trollope, Harriet Martineau, Dinah Mulock Craik and neo-Victorian novels. She is currently working on a critical monograph on Charlotte Riddell.

Mark Eslick (PhD, U. York) researches nineteenth-century fiction, especially Dickens; also religious conflict and anti-Catholicism. Now at the University of Brighton, Mark is currently developing a book-length project provisionally titled *Myths, Conspiracies and Nightmares: The Jesuit in the Victorian Imagination*. He is also writing a radio documentary about English poet, clergyman and mesmerist, Chauncy Hare Townshend.

Aileen Farrar, a fourth-year PhD fellow at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, studies Early American, Restoration, Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Literature, and Feminist Theory. Her dissertation explores memory and imagination in transatlantic nineteenth-century literature.

Stacey Floyd, Assistant Professor of English at Cardinal Stritch University, is co-editor of *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* (online journal) and *New Woman Writers, Authority and the Body* (2009). A contributor to *Nineteenth Century Literature Criticism* (working-class literature) and to MLA Options for Teaching series, her interests include representations of the working class in the long nineteenth century, women's writing, and body studies.

Brad Fruhauff is Assistant Professor of English at Trinity International University and Editor-in-Chief of *Relief: A Christian Literary Expression*. His research interests include Charles Dickens, the Gothic and sentimental, ethical criticism, and hermeneutic theory.

Shu-Fang Lai is Associate Professor at National Sun Yat-Sen University, Taiwan. Her interests include Victorian Science and Literature, 19th-C periodicals, Scottish Children's Literature, and Literary Translation. She is the author of *Charles Reade, George Meredith and Harriet Martineau as Serial Writers of Once a Week, 1859-1865* (2008), and has published articles in *Dickensian*, *Dickens Quarterly* and *Victorian Periodicals Review*, *Victorian Newsletter*, and *Scottish Literary Review*. She is presently working on a book entitled *Victorian Fancy*.

Klaudia Hiu Yen Lee has just completed her PhD on the early reception of Charles Dickens in China at the University of Nottingham. Her research interests are Victorian literature, print culture, literary history and cross-cultural interactions in 19th- and early 20th-centuries.

Katharyn Stober is a PhD student at University of North Texas. Her research interest is 19th-century British Literature, particularly Dickens and Victorian Culture, and humor in literature.

Helen Williams is a PhD student in the School of English, Drama, American and Canadian Studies at the University of Birmingham. Her thesis explores the representation of medicine and middle-class healthcare in the novels of Wilkie Collins, reading his texts alongside contemporary layperson writings on medicine, and is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Her main interests are in representations of medicine, illness and disability in Victorian literature and culture.

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