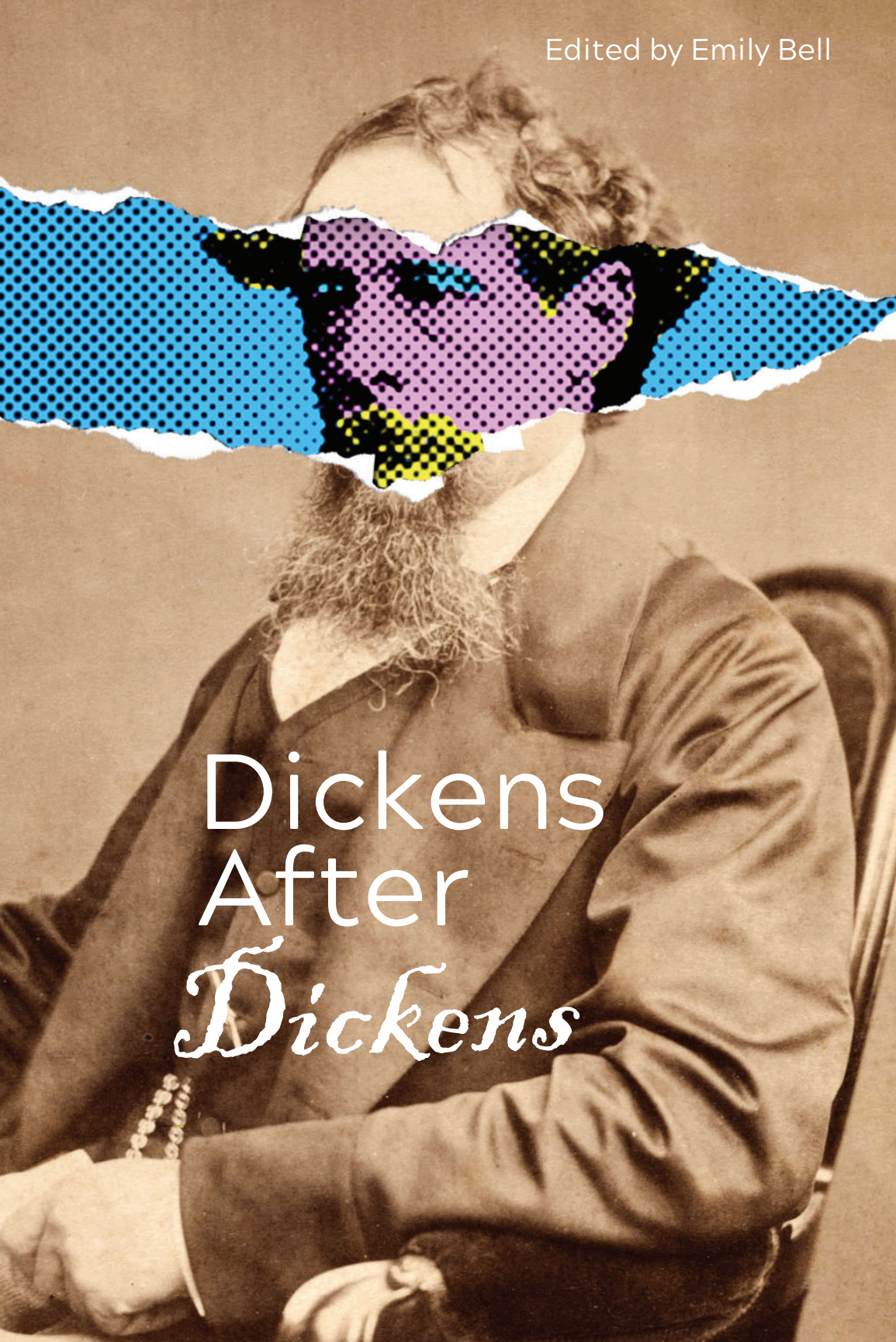
Edited by Emily Bell



Dickens After *Dickens*

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Edited by
Emily Bell

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Foreword

Juliet John, Royal Holloway, University of London

> I want to suppose a certain SHADOW, which may go into any place … and be in all homes, and all nooks and corners, and be supposed to be cognisant of everything, and go everywhere, without the least difficulty …; a kind of semi-omniscient, omnipresent, intangible creature. … I want the compiled part of the paper to express the idea of this Shadow's having been in libraries, and among the books referred to. I want him to loom as a fanciful thing all over London; … an odd, unsubstantial, whimsical, new thing: a sort of previously unthought-of Power going about … in which people will be perfectly willing to believe, and which is just mysterious and quaint enough to have a sort of charm for their imagination, while it will represent common sense and humanity. I want to express in the title, and in the grasp of the idea to express also, that it is the Thing at everybody's elbow, and in everybody's footsteps. At the window, by the fire, in the street, in the house, from infancy to old age, everyone's inseparable companion.
>
> (Charles Dickens, letter to John Forster, 7 October 1849)

This is Charles Dickens trying to explain to John Forster what he wanted his own journal to achieve: nothing short of an 'omnipresent' influence, intangible yet pervasive, mysterious yet associated with 'common sense and humanity'. There is, arguably, no better summary of Dickens's wildly ambitious vision for his own art and influence than this under-studied passage. Not content with conventional literary influence, Dickens wanted, like the Shadow he describes, to be here, there, and everywhere, yet simultaneously unfathomable, an 'unthought-of Power'. Could this be why his will famously 'conjure[d]' his friends, 'on no account to make me the subject of any monument, memorial or

testimonial whatsoever' (Forster 859)? As Emily Bell discusses in her Introduction to this volume, the instructions of his will have baffled many; but viewed through the perspective of this earlier letter to Forster, it seems much easier to understand why Dickens would have preferred to figure his influence through the ubiquitous, uncircumscribed, immaterial 'Power' of the Shadow, than through the materially and intellectually circumscribed forms of the monument, memorial or testimonial.

The 'After Dickens' conference held at the University of York in 2016 was one of the best Dickens conferences I have attended in some time, gathering academics from a range of disciplines to reflect on the 'unthought-of Power' of Dickens's legacy. 150 years after his death, Dickens's influence seems obvious and substantial, but its nature is somehow also intangible. As E. M. Forster said of Mr Pickwick many years ago, he seems to be 'round', yet viewed edgeways is 'not thicker than a gramophone record. But we never get the sideway view' (79). This verdict on Dickens is often seen as damning, but Forster's main point is that Dickens's 'conjuring trick' is unfathomable. Critics are still trying to work it out; moreover, the 'conjuring' seems to underscore not just his characters, but his cultural influence, and indeed the very idea of Dickens. When John Bowen argues in this volume that we are always 'waiting on' and 'waiting for' Dickens, is this because he is always there and not there: a Shadow?

It has not always seemed so: before post-structuralists began to probe the notion that Dickens was a failed realist, and biographers began to strip away the layers of biographical myth-making that Dickens himself had himself set in train, the author had perhaps seemed more knowable. And, perhaps, more limited, because what was known was limited, lacking the 'sideway view'. It is perhaps surprising that widespread critical attention to Dickens's broader influence on British and global culture is a relatively recent phenomenon, coming after the Dickens of post-structuralism and biographical revisionism: always evident in pockets, Dickens's cultural influence has crystallised as perhaps the most dynamic area of current Dickens studies since the 2012 bicentenary, when the question of what Dickens meant to different kinds of people around the world garnered global attention. The question of what is, perhaps, easier to answer than why – and even where – however: why the influence of Dickens extended so far beyond, as well as after, Dickens.

As Emily Bell argues in her Introduction, critical studies of Dickensian afterlives tend to take either a panoramic or a very focused view, examining specific intertextual relationships. Both approaches have their value, but the ideal would surely be synergy between the macro and the micro view. Building on her work as organiser of 'After Dickens', Bell takes us here on a journey towards synergy, bookending the collection with her own fine, macroscopic Introduction and the pairing of her subtle and considered chapter on biofiction with her former supervisor John Bowen's characteristically clever literary and philosophical take on 'Waiting for Dickens'. In between, the standard of the chapters is uniformly high: there is a specific emphasis on *reading* Dickens and intertextuality – not

just literary intertextuality but on screen (Laurena Tsudama's excellent chapter on *The Wire*) and on stage (Michael Eaton's illuminating take, as a practitioner, on adapting *Great Expectations* for the stage). Global Dickens is here: Kathy Rees on Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Katie Bell on William Faulkner, Rob Jacklosky on Donna Tartt. There are, inevitably, chapters that interrogate Dickens's writing in relation to gender (Claire O'Callaghan and Pete Orford; Francesca Arnavas through the lens of sci-fi). Perhaps only Joanna Hofer-Robinson's strong leading chapter on the influence of Dickens's Jacob's Island on sanitary form and the cultural memory of this area of London takes us clearly beyond the intertextual. There were many fine papers from the originary conference that I would like to have seen represented here – not least, Kamilla Elliott's keynote which analysed Dickens's appearance in *Assassin's Creed* (2015), Geraldine Meaney's '*Bleak House* and Social Network Analysis: Dickens through the Macroscope' and Jan-Melissa Schramm's 'Charles Dickens and the Postcolonial Imagination' – but this is simply a comment on strength in depth of the work Bell's conference solicited, and yet more evidence that 'waiting' is a perennial state for Dickens critics.

A note (or more) of caution. Before writing this Foreword, I re-read John Sutherland's Foreword to a volume I co-edited with Alice Jenkins exactly 20 years ago, at the start of my career. The book was *Rereading Victorian Fiction* (2000), and the conference, 'Victorian Studies: Into the 21st Century', was designed as a millennial stock taking, but also a future-focused collective conversation about the state of the field. In what he called a 'cross-grained' comment, Sutherland made the point 'that more "reading" of Victorian fiction is desirable. Forget rereading'. Shortly after, he lamented the canonical balance of the conference, listing the main authors discussed, including 'Dickens and Dickens and Dickens' (xi). His point, at that millennial moment, was that only certain Victorian authors were being read (admittedly those whose texts 'reward rereading and revisiting' [xi]), and more minor authors were being lost. Most Victorianists would agree that digital tools, along with the work of scholars like Sutherland and collectives like the Victorian Popular Fiction Association, have greatly expanded critical focus to include more 'popular' fiction in the academy over the last 20 years. But something else has also been happening: the decline of reading more generally, and the narrowing of the Victorian canon in a soundbite generation, at both schools and universities, to shorter texts – in the case of Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (1843) (Dickens's most adapted and influential text, though not a 'novel') and *Oliver Twist* (1837–39). In 2000, Sutherland asked if criticism helps us to '"know" more about Victorian fiction?' (xii), putting the question: 'if you had a time machine capable of forward or reverse travel, and wanted – by some absurd whim – to use it to find out more about Victorian fiction, which way would you go?'. He concludes, apocalyptically: 'I accept that we see literature more clearly as time passes, but the clarity is at the wrong end of the telescope. Textures and the feel of the original are lost. At some point, it will be lost altogether' (xii).

Leaving aside the obvious theoretical questions these comments raise about who creates literary meaning and how, they raise specific questions for those concerned with analysing Dickens after Dickens: will Dickens always be 'known' (not in a philosophical sense, but in the sense of being read, and culturally influential)? If so, will he be known mainly through mediation? I am not the only critic to argue that already Dickens is known more through the screen than through books among the general public, for example. Running through this volume is a consistent engagement with the role of neo-Victorianism in knowing Dickens, and indeed the Victorians. Though Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010) are usually credited with being the first to formally define the neo-Victorian as a contemporary genre which engages critically and self-consciously with the Victorians, it is interesting that Sutherland himself was the first to identify 'a strikingly new topic of critical discussion' in his Foreword to *Rereading Victorian Fiction*, describing the topic as 'those "rereadings" of Victorian fiction that result in contemporary rewriting', arguing that 'Victorian novels, as Robin Gilmour argued, can be written in the 1990s'. Gilmour's groundbreaking essay in the volume, 'Using the Victorians: The Victorian Age in Contemporary Fiction', distinguishes between the 'more self-conscious' use of the Victorians in the last third of the 20th century and 'the straightforward historical novel with a period setting' in a way that anticipates Heilmann and Llewellyn's later definition (189).

The relevance of this genealogical detour is not simply to establish that Gilmour and Sutherland were the first to draw attention to what we now call neo-Victorianism, but to pinpoint the importance of why their contribution to identifying a field has been somewhat erased: most obviously, they did not coin the term 'neo-Victorian'. Indeed, Sutherland calls this new kind of fiction 'Victorian', even though he is writing about novelists like John Fowles and Michèle Roberts, who are commonly labelled 'neo-Victorian' today. The difference in terminology captures a difference of emphasis: Sutherland assumes that contemporary novelists who use the Victorians are working (even if self-consciously) with them and not against them, consciously, and neo-Victorianism criticism can have a tendency to associate self-reflexivity with a narrative of contemporary political progress away from the originary text. The best 'neo-Victorian' essays in the current volume, like Gilmour's foundational essay in this field, embrace the creative tensions and mutuality between past and present, eschewing easy and superficial presentism. It is not a revelation to discover that Dickensian gender politics are more dubious than those of most self-respecting contemporary writers and adapters. Neo-Victorian criticism is most rewarding when it teaches us about the contemporary and the past, rather than using the present to 'other' the past, and when it yokes texts to contexts and cultural formations. There is perhaps more to do on the latter, a need to harness more routinely audience research methodologies taken from sociology, screen and cultural studies, as well as the evidential focus of book historians, to probe the claims made for neo-Victorian politics

more rigorously. Literary critics can tend to assume that a text's effect/affect is circumscribed by the individual acts of interpretation of critics and reviewers: but what is the audience (in terms of numbers and demographic reach) of radical revisionist texts? How do readers/audience members at large see the Victorians through neo-Victorian texts? And is it only the screen (e.g. *The Wire*, Sarah Waters' adaptations, almost inevitably gaming) that will command the cultural and political 'reach' of Dickens in his heyday? For Dickensians, in the sphere of cultural production, how can the present and the Dickensian past work together for the benefit of time 'yet to come'?

Is the right concluding question, ultimately, how will Dickens always continue after Dickens, or will Dickens continue after Dickens? Current evidence suggests confidence but not complacency, and if we understand better the shifting morphology of Dickens's legacy, his legacy becomes more future proof. Emily Bell starts this book with G. K. Chesterton's words from his 'Note on the Future of Dickens': 'we have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant' (150). His temporal play brings to mind Sutherland's time travel 'conundrum', and suggests our answer: 'if you had a time machine capable of forward or reverse travel, and wanted – by some absurd whim – to use it to find out more about Victorian fiction, which way would you go?'. As the circular title to this volume suggests, the answer is both ways.

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Introduction

Emily Bell, Loughborough University

> [W]e have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant: and the passage is along a rambling English road, a twisting road such as Mr. Pickwick travelled. But this at least is part of what he meant; that comradeship and serious joy are not interludes in our travel; but that rather our travels are interludes in comradeship and joy, which through God shall endure for ever. The inn does not point to the road; the road points to the inn. And all roads point at last to an ultimate inn, where we shall meet Dickens and all his characters: and when we drink again it shall be from the great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world.
>
> (G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*)

In 1906, G. K. Chesterton published a detailed analysis of Charles Dickens, ending his groundbreaking study with 'A Note on the Future of Dickens'. Chesterton closes this religiously infused final chapter with the enigmatic promise that readers will meet Dickens, and his characters, in 'the tavern at the end of the world' (150). At a threshold moment for Dickens studies, Chesterton is not only looking back to find Dickens; he is also looking forward. The passage above is wonderfully evocative in its temporal confusion: we are both returning (to drink again) and also travelling *forward*, to the end of the world. It is also, significantly, to get *back* to what Dickens meant: Dickens is both ahead

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of us and behind us in this formulation. The Dickens we return to as readers, as the chapters in this volume will show through a complex interweaving of methodologies, approaches, and sources, is changed by the journey we have travelled since. This journey is personal, generational, political, social: it is the journey travelled since Dickens began the serialisation of any particular text, or since the first book was published; the journey his works and characters have travelled since his death; the journey of any society or culture in which Dickens is read; and our own journey, perhaps since a last reading of the text, or since a significant moment in a reader's life.

Chesterton was writing against a wave of critical opinion at the turn of the 20th century that had concluded that Dickens was inferior to the great realists of the century before. It is easy to imagine that, to Chesterton, it felt that Dickens was being lost to a past that had failed to appreciate him; the author's reputation had fluctuated since his death, though his popularity among the wider reading public had hardly wavered (John Gardiner has shown this by using the example of a randomly selected day in the 1920s at a Newcastle library: 53 out of 75 Dickens novels in the collection were on loan on that day [164]). In positioning Dickens as an epitome of English values and predicting that he would ultimately stand above his contemporaries (a position that we might now take for granted), Chesterton was nailing his colours to the mast. Of course, Chesterton was right in many ways, and Dickens has remained a singularly popular author, though it would take decades before his reputation would recover and academic study of Dickens would become legitimised.[1] This ongoing popularity is not limited to Britain; Dickens is the 25th most translated author globally (Regenia Gagnier 111). The *Unesco Index Translationum: World Bibliography of Translation 1978-Present* places him second only to Arthur Conan Doyle among Victorian writers, and he is the 'ninth most translated author in China' and 'fourth in Egypt' (Gagnier 111).

The reasons for Dickens's singular popularity have been much discussed. There are few authors who have maintained such a steady presence in the mind of the reading public; in this, Dickens is second only to William Shakespeare. Jane Austen, who has been compared to Shakespeare in a new volume that explores their shared and diverging reception (*Jane Austen and William Shakespeare: A Love Affair in Literature, Film and Performance*, 2019), is another writer who might compete with Dickens for sheer volume of adaptations and the infusion of nostalgia that accompanies them. This comparison is significant because of the focus on their powers of social observation and their use of humour, and there are passionate Austen 'fans', much as there are Dickens ones – perhaps to an even greater extent in some areas, such as groups that dress up as Austen's characters. However, unlike Dickens, it was the shaping of Austen's posthumous reputation that created an intense interest in the author that far outpaced her popularity as a living writer. Other 19th-century writers have not captured the public imagination in quite the same way: Lucasta Miller's detailed examination of *The Brontë Myth* (2004) is suggestive in

thinking about Dickens, showing the ambivalence inherent in the ambitious desire for fame and the need to protect a reputation, but the commemorative activities around the bicentenaries of the Brontë sisters in 2016, 2018, and 2020 have not been as wide-ranging as those of Dickens.

So why is Dickens so perennially interesting? Many arguments have been made about his humour, his importance in representing and shaping attitudes to social issues of his day, and the resonances of his characters (although this too has changed over time; a discussion of Dickens's best novel in 1904 excluded not only *David Copperfield* but also *The Pickwick Papers*, to avoid limiting the scope of the discussion,[2] while today you would be hard pressed to find a reader that would place *Pickwick* so far above the rest). Since his death, he has become increasingly bound up with the 'Victorian', so much so that 'Dickensian' and 'Victorian' are often used more or less interchangeably. Although there is excellent work on the afterlives of other Victorian authors, including Amber K. Regis and Deborah Wynne's *Charlotte Brontë: Legacies and Afterlives* (2017), it is that stubborn undercurrent of popular interest that makes Dickens stand out: even when critical opinion is uncertain of him, he is not there to be rediscovered. He is ever present. This constant presence means that nostalgia for the Dickensian remains at both a societal and individual level; for some he is representative of a sort of golden age of fiction or a paragon of Victorian values, but he is also a writer we (in the UK at least) have read as children, whom our parents and grandparents read, whose name we have lived with in the media in some form for generations. It is no wonder, then, that Dickens representations in the media often take on the gloss of nostalgia in presenting 'the romantic side of familiar things' (*Bleak House* 6), to borrow Dickens's own words. His cultural importance, whether lazily employed as a cultural touchstone or more deeply questioned as part of understanding our own heritage, merits a close attention to its creation, maintenance, and transformations.

It is difficult to imagine now, when beleaguered schoolchildren seem to see Dickens as an inescapable literary institution, that Dickens could have been considered a lowbrow writer. While it is not possible to trace and attribute this shift to any specific historical moment, the 20th century is filled with many such moments that demonstrate Dickens's further entrenchment in the public consciousness, such as the calls for small, cheap editions of Dickens's works to be sent to the front lines in the First World War, which certainly contributed to a binding of Dickens with Englishness and patriotism (Cordery; see also Gardiner 165 and Curtis 164). Other critics have viewed the 1940s as a turning point in Dickens studies, with the publication of Edmund Wilson's 'The Two Scrooges' and George Orwell's 'Charles Dickens' in 1940, two foundational essays in literary criticism that independently re-evaluated Dickens (Slater 110; Collins, 143; Ella Westland, 'The Making of Dickens: Conflicts in Criticism 1940–1970'). Michael Slater concedes that 'the Twenties and the Thirties will never loom large in any history of Dickens criticism', but nevertheless argues that Dickens 'probably cut more of a figure in the press of the period than he

had done at any time since 1870' (142). What the first three chapters in this volume show, through analysis of Dickens's invocation in the newspapers in the name of the disappearing Jacob's Island, exploration of Dickens's influence in Norway, and attention to the pervasive resonances of Dickens with William Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932), respectively, is that Dickens's influence was still being felt in surprising ways during this supposedly low ebb. Where analyses of Dickens's reputation have elided the 1870–1930 period into one of low interest, the opening chapters of this volume challenge us to reassess how Dickens's legacy was expressed during these formative years.

And, if critical interest in Dickens had hit a low in its early decades, by the mid-20th century the floodgates had opened. The rise of neo-Victorian fiction in the 1960s further deepened the public interest in the author, and the establishment of the Dickens Society in 1970 represented another formal, international recognition of the value of academic study of Dickens. The 20th century would also see two societies set up to commemorate Dickens in contrasting ways: the Boz Club, established by Percy Fitzgerald, a contributor to Dickens's journals, in 1900, and the Dickens Fellowship, established in 1902 with a broader membership.[3] Dickens's early reputation owes much to the efforts of these two societies, which not only met for their own communal acts of remembrance but also engaged in public events and literary debates about Dickens. In a 1919 book review, Virginia Woolf commented, 'Perhaps no one has suffered more than Dickens from the enthusiasm of his admirers, by which he has been made to appear not so much a great writer as an intolerable institution' (163). This act of institutionalising started as an act of remembrance, and, as the early foundations for this institutionalisation recede into the past, many of the associations that we have with Dickens stemming from them are lost. The following chapters begin the work of recovering some of those connections and associations.

In the 21st century, the 'Dickens industry' is still in full flow: the bicentenary of Dickens's birth in 2012 was characterised by an effluence of new works and criticism that sought particularly to try to understand what Dickens means to the modern world. This is not a trivial question, nor simply a hunt for academic 'impact' on the general public. Literary and historical studies are increasingly facing questions about their value in the modern world, and also being asked to tackle, head on, the ramifications of the colonial and imperial heritage that has shaped the very idea of the literary canon and what exactly the museums and institutions that engage in preserving this literary heritage should be doing. To answer the question of what it means to read Dickens today is to consider how we continue to relate to that past, and how we might use it to write a more inclusive literary future. In this light, we can re-evaluate Dickens's work for social reform, but also his racial politics and his problematic portrayals of women. Although neo-Victorian Dickensian fiction has taken up the thread of Dickens's women most strongly, as discussed in Chapters 4, 5, 7, and 10, as early as the 1860s writers such as the Norwegian novelist Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

(as discussed in Chapter 2) were revising and rewriting Dickens's women into powerful critiques of patriarchal society.

Studies of Dickens's reputation fall, broadly, into two camps: wide-angle approaches that attempt to condense nearly two centuries of Dickens's own myth-making and subsequent attempts to shape his legacy, or narrowly focused analyses of specific characters and texts. Several wide-ranging studies of Dickens's cultural legacy have appeared since the 1990s, including Laurence W. Mazzeno's survey of *The Dickens Industry: Critical Perspectives 1836–2005* (2008), Juliet John's *Dickens and Mass Culture* (2010), and more focused cultural histories, such as those by Paul Davis (1990) and Mary Hammond (2016), which maintain a compelling argument through remaining more tightly focused (on the character of Scrooge and on *Great Expectations*, respectively). Jay Clayton's *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (2003) was one of the first to explore Dickens's popular consumption online as well as offline, a topic which has also been analysed more recently by Juliet John (2018), who suggests that Dickens's online life, unlike his stubborn 'lowbrow' popularity in the early 20th century, is a top-down rather than grass-roots movement. Essentially, Dickens's novels have been tweeted and blogged, but primarily led by academics.[4] This more conservative presence online is surprising, given Dickens's radical potential.

Dickens After Dickens offers a new approach to Dickens's cultural legacy, presenting a series of case studies that highlight Dickens's diverse adaptability and translatability across forms and across time. It comes at another threshold moment for Dickens studies as, hard on the heels of the 2012 bicentenary, we prepare to commemorate the 150th anniversary of his death in 2020. Between these two key dates, our understanding of Dickens and adaptation has expanded dramatically to include Dickens in video games, Dickens online, and his cultural legacy in various forms, from apps that lead you on a walk of Dickens's London to a new web series of *David Copperfield* (Quip Modest Productions, 2019). As Linda Hutcheon notes in her foundational work on adaptation, 'Adaptation has run amok. That's why we can't understand its appeal and even its nature if we only consider novels and films' (Hutcheon xiii). As such, the present volume problematises an easy understanding of what adapting Dickens means, and of what Dickens himself means in these various contexts. It does so through, for example, analysis of previously overlooked biofictional material, or discussion of the challenges of adapting Dickens and the uneasy relation between the reader as voyeur of gendered violence, or Dickens in new contexts – whether in urban planning, as discussed in Chapter 1, in another country, as discussed in Chapter 2 by Kathy Rees and Chapter 3 by Katie Bell, or on TV, as discussed in Chapter 8 by Laurena Tsudama. It furthers work on authorial afterlives by its subtle and wide-ranging understanding of influence, and offers reflections on 150 years of post-Dickens Dickens.

Taken as a whole, the collection attempts to revise not only our sense of Dickens's afterlives but also ideas of authenticity, adaptation, and nostalgia.

Dickens's binding with the 'Victorian' has blurred the lines between fiction and history, not only in literary or media adaptations of Dickens but also in how London itself is shaped and remembered, as discussed in Chapter 1, which traces a process of Dickens-as-research and Dickens-as-reference that culminates in nostalgia for a part of London previously deemed unsanitary and unsafe. Resonances can be found across the chapters in their interest in Dickens's women, the concept of the 'Dickensian', and what it means to read Dickens, but there is also the ongoing fascination with mysteries and incompleteness, most obviously in Pete Orford's discussion of completions and solutions to the unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) in Chapter 5 but also in the need to provide Miss Havisham's story, discussed by Claire O'Callaghan in Chapter 4, or the pragmatic discussion of the edits and cuts needed to bring the same story to the stage in Michael Eaton's discussion in Chapter 9. The chapters offer more historically grounded approaches, close reading of specific passages and characters, and detailed analysis of adaptations and neo-Victorian rewritings, ranging across a diverse body of materials, not only in terms of the Dickens texts under discussion but also a wide range of cultural, literary, and social contexts.

The question of what Dickens *means*, then, is still not a straightforward one in the public imagination, nor in the chapters that follow. This is most clearly evident in the word 'Dickensian' itself. Take, for example, this comment from the *London Review of Books* website following the exciting discovery by Jeremy Parrott of annotated names in 10 volumes of Dickens's journal *All The Year Round* in 2015 (in which articles had been, on the whole, published anonymously):[5]

> The word 'Dickensian' has such a depth of smothering colour to those many of us who view the great man as a mere journalist, and whose fictional porter cocktail has too much ingredient of cockney fantasy; that this incunabulaic find brings into question this prejudice. … It seems then that there is an epidemic truth running through his oeuvre, gestated in the need to produce copy. So the value of Dickens is in its variety – I adjust my view accordingly. (*LRB Blog* n.pag.)

Where to begin? The phrase 'a depth of smothering colour' is wonderfully and weirdly evocative, but most importantly demonstrates that even now the idea of the 'Dickensian' is being shaped and changed, whether by discoveries like this, or new representations of Dickens's works such as the recent *Dickensian* TV series written by *Eastenders*' Tony Jordan (BBC, 2015–2016), which placed many of Dickens's best-known characters (and a few lesser-known ones) on one street, playing out new stories or building up to the narratives Dickens had plotted for them, discussed in more detail in Claire O'Callaghan's analysis of Miss Havisham's afterlives in Chapter 4. The very idea of the 'Dickensian' is in a constant process of adaptation and revision. On the one hand, the value

of Dickens is in its variety – not *his* variety, but the variety of the work. On the other hand, Dickensian London is intended to conjure a shared image, perhaps coloured by '[f]og everywhere' (*BH* 12), peopled with orphans like Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, and Esther Summerson. Dickensian London is a place for Dickens's characters, but also for the author himself to live: *Dickensian* London is a way of imagining *Victorian* London. In the same way, a Dickensian child such as Oliver or David might share characteristics with Dickens himself as a child. The border between Dickens's life and his characters is inherently blurred in the term 'Dickensian', just as it is in biographies and biofictions, as I discuss in Chapter 10.

Then again, if I were to ask what Stephen Crabb as Secretary of State for Wales had meant in 2015 when he berated the 'Dickensian' way that Labour 'paint a picture of low pay, of unstable and short-term work, of repressive and irresponsible bosses running abusive workplaces' there might be some more diverse answers (Nick Servini n.pag.). He tells us he is complaining about the *way* Labour paint that picture – should we then expect to find something of Dickens's prose in Labour's rhetoric? Or is a concern with low pay and unstable work in line with Dickens's character and concerns in his fiction? Has he simply misplaced the adjective? In many ways, the idea of the 'Dickensian' is not something to pause over, or probe too deeply. This volume, then, aims to push back against this, and encourages the reader to pause. The chapters thus probe the meaning of this term in contrasting ways, particularly the role of humour in the characteristically Dickensian, as discussed by Rob Jacklosky in Chapter 6.

So the idea of the 'Dickensian' is plural, and does not seem to need a basis in the author's life or writings. How did it get there? Not all authors become adjectives. We may describe things as 'Shakespearean' and 'Kafkaesque', for example, but rarely is anything described as 'Thackerayean', and certainly not outside of academia. Dickens's reputation and legacy, and consequently the values we associate with him, have undergone a complicated process of mediation, as explored in detail in John's book *Dickens and Mass Culture* (2010). The articles in this volume continue this conversation, showing the diverse ways in which Dickens has lived on in fiction of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, but also in film, television, video games, and even architecture.

Remembering Dickens has never been a purely literary project, though Dickens's famous stipulation in his will that his friends 'on no account … make me the subject of any monument, memorial or testimonial whatsoever' (John Forster 859) has made other kinds of commemoration difficult. Each category (monument, memorial, testimonial) is distinct, but each can be interpreted in different ways. Monuments can be commemorative effigies, but also tombs: Dickens's instruction to have only 'Charles Dickens', without any title, on his gravestone would suggest that he intended both senses. Later, his son, Henry Dickens, would refer to the will in discussing the establishment of the Dickens Fellowship, arguing his father 'neither desired, nor does he need, material monuments', but that the Fellowship was somehow a different, more acceptable

kind of monument (speech on the 92nd anniversary 367). A memorial can be a festival, observance or commemorative event; something to assist memory; a charitable donation; or even a memoir or reminiscence. In Dickens's fiction, *David Copperfield*'s Mr Dick is writing a memorial into which Charles the First keeps intruding, but it is comically unclear which kind of memorial it is. David asks,

> 'Is it a Memorial about his own history that he is writing, aunt?'
>
> 'Yes, child,' said my aunt, rubbing her nose again. 'He is memorialising the Lord Chancellor, or the Lord Somebody or other – one of those people, at all events, who are paid to *be* memorialized – about his affairs. I suppose it will go in, one of these days. He hasn't been able to draw it up yet, without introducing that mode of expressing himself; but it don't signify; it keeps him employed.' (175)

Betsey Trotwood's answer plays on the sense of a memorial as a petition, as a personal record of a life, and as an object to be given. This ambivalence is present in Dickens's own life: Gladys Storey records that Katey Dickens insisted her father 'put no value on possessions' so was going to throw away his reading desk; nevertheless, he was 'pleased that she had asked for it and wanted to possess it' (Dickens Museum, Storey Papers, Milkman's Account Book, entry 8 February 1925). A testimonial can be an account given by way of evidence, a will, or an attestation of qualifications and character. With such a wide range of possible interpretations, it is unsurprising that this request has often been ignored, especially in the 20th and 21st centuries: in 1912, the *Daily News* reported that Madame Tussaud's was creating a Dickens waxwork ('Charles Dickens – An Unconventional Portrait', 7 February 1912), while, 202 years after his birth, a statue was erected in his birthplace, Portsmouth (Claire Wood 166). We should not be surprised, then, to find him used as a reference in the reshaping of London itself, as described in Chapter 1.

The chapters in this volume are drawn from the 'After Dickens' conference, held at York on 2–3 December 2016, which sought to continue this work to 'find' Dickens and recapture the characteristically Dickensian, bringing together new research into Dickens's afterlife and legacy, from his influence on Victorian literature, social reform, and literary criticism to biographies, reminiscences, and reimaginings in the 20th century and beyond. As such, they take a wide range of approaches to the question of Dickens's afterlife, but all ask what it means to *read* Dickens, whether as a literary critic (Chapter 11), a novelist (Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in Chapter 2, William Faulkner in Chapter 3, Donna Tartt in Chapter 6, and Neal Stephenson in Chapter 7), adaptors of various kinds (Chapters 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10), or even urban developers and sanitary reformers (Chapter 1).

In Chapter 1, '"Once upon a time would not prove to be All-time or even a long time." From Sanitary Reform to Cultural Memory: The Case of Jacob's Island', Joanna Hofer-Robinson provides an analysis of the instrumentality of

Dickens's writing in the context of mid-19th-century urban redevelopment, revealing how fiction takes on the sheen of history through a case study focused on Jacob's Island and the afterlife with which it was imbued by *Oliver Twist* (1837–39). Her chapter demonstrates the novel's invocation in sanitary reform in the 19th century and the use of Dickens's description in arguing for the demolition of the area in the 20th century. This is innovative work that crosses from print culture to the built environment, pushing Dickens's 'afterlives' beyond the usual suspects of theatrical and filmic adaptation. This thread of social reform is taken up in Chapter 7, 'Little Nell in the Cyber Age', in which Francesca Arnavas explores Neal Stephenson's novel *The Diamond Age* (1995) and how Stephenson uses the neo-Victorian mode to critique Dickens's restricted perspective on reading and education, proposing alternative solutions that foster individuality, particularly for women, and in Chapter 2, 'Nordic Dickens: Dickensian Resonances in the Work of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson', in which Kathy Rees outlines the significance of Dickens for Norwegian identity formation. While much attention has been given to Dickens's reception in Germany, France, and Italy, his influence upon Scandinavian literary traditions is less well known and Rees addresses this gap, while also providing the single example of his 'translatability' for this volume. Rees highlights the commonalities between Bjørnson and Dickens, but argues that the Norwegian writer's intertextual engagement emphasises a Norwegian feminist ideology found to be lacking in Dickens. The analysis of Dickens's resonances in a new national context speak well to the discussion in Chapter 3 of Dickens's presence in the literature of the American South in the post-Civil War decades. In addition, the topic of Dickens and women brings together several chapters in this volume, whether showing how neo-Victorian adaptations represent gendered violence, as in Chapter 4's exploration of the afterlives of Miss Havisham, and in Pete Orford's analysis of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*'s (1870) Rosa Bud in Chapter 5, which shows how completions of Dickens's last, unfinished novel have sought to emulate or move away from the 'Dickensian' through their treatment of her. Orford writes in Chapter 5 about the 'completions' and 'solutions' of Dickens's unfinished novel as a peculiar form of afterlife that demonstrates the ways in which Dickens's writing is refashioned to suit contemporary needs and desires. O'Callaghan's discussion encompasses the uncomfortable underside of nostalgia for the 'Dickensian', and forces the reader to confront the uneasy voyeurism of reading endless rewritings of Miss Havisham's tragedy.

Defining the Dickensian is a central concern of Chapters 6, '"The Thing and Not the Thing": The Contemporary Dickensian Novel and Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch* (2013)', and Chapter 8, 'Dickensian Realism in *The Wire*', which variously consider the role of humour and realism in capturing the Dickensian. Jacklosky probes the easy alignment of Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch* (2013) with the Dickensian in reviews of the novel, providing a detailed discussion of the text that probes its debt to Dickens, shedding new light on how we consider Dickens's literary inheritors and their relationship with nostalgia that speaks well to the

analysis of Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932) in Chapter 3, and Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* (1995) in Chapter 7, which highlights the dangers of nostalgia for the Victorian. Chapter 8's exploration of Dickensian realism in the TV series *The Wire* (2002–2008) not only argues for recognition of the debt that the American crime drama owes to Dickens but also pushes back against the idea that Dickens and realism are antithetical, which took root at the end of the 19th century, by showing the strategies employed by Dickens to highlight the realities of social inequality. This chapter conducts an intermedial analysis between fiction and television, broadening the volume's scope beyond print culture.

In Chapter 9, dramatist Michael Eaton reflects on what it means to adapt Dickens, providing a frank and insightful exploration of what is lost in adaptation, what the visual can bring to the textual, and how decisions might be made, from early illustrators of *Great Expectations* (1861) through Dickens's own reading text, which removed Estella entirely, to W. S. Gilbert's stage production of 1871, which excised Miss Havisham from the plot, to Eaton's own production for the West Yorkshire Playhouse, staged in 2016, offering a practical consideration of putting Dickens on the stage, and reflections that bring together the performance history of the text and Eaton's own thought processes. In Chapter 10, 'Fictional Dickenses', this question of adaptation is applied to Dickens as a fictional character, exploring examples of biofiction ranging from the earliest example published in 1849 to more recent appearances in the video game *Assassins Creed: Syndicate* (2015) and the controversial play *A Very Very Very Dark Matter* (2018). The chapter considers what has changed and what has remained the same in the 150 years since Dickens's death, showing how biographical discourse and fictional representations worked in reciprocal ways to shape and critique Dickens's legacy.

Finally, in Chapter 11, 'Waiting, for Dickens', John Bowen explores the role of waiters in Dickens's fiction, demonstrating how elements of the characteristically Dickensian are captured in the author's fascination with the role of waiting; the close attention to the social notation of waiting delineated by Bowen can be brought into conversation with the focus on Dickens's powers of observation absent from the biofictional text *The Battle of London Life: or, Boz and His Secretary* (1849) but present throughout later biographies and novelisations of Dickens's life, as explored in Chapter 10. Bowen's analysis positions the reader of Dickens as waiting *on* and waiting *for* him, demonstrating how the act of literary critique interplays with the idea of this kind of waiting: his analysis enacts this close scrutiny as it unveils it. Bowen considers what Dickens's writing suggests about time, social dynamics and performance, opening out into a consideration of the ways in which we continue to read Dickens. The chapter relates Dickens's complex relationship to time, as also explored by many other contributions to this volume, to the reader's own experience of waiting for, returning to, and anticipating Dickens.

Many of the chapters in this volume question how we might transport ourselves to the Dickensian past, or what it would mean to inhabit a Dickensian

future. And, yet, Dickens as intertext has an elasticity which is belied by the term 'Dickensian' itself. Variations including 'Dickenesque', 'Dickensesque', and 'Dickensish' all appeared as late as the 1880s, and the uses of those terms were similarly varied: we have 'Dickensish depths of human nature' in *The Spectator* (20), for example. Why 'Dickensian' ultimately became the chosen adjective is difficult to pin down, but it might have something to do with the specificity of the word: it is more defining than the weaker sentiments of Dickens*ish* or Dickens*esque*, but, paradoxically, no more static or fixed in meaning, as the following chapters will show. The afterlife of Dickens captured by the word 'Dickensian' holds a complex association with the biographical referent, the works, public discourse, and broader social change. As such, this volume brings together new research into Dickens's afterlife and legacy that effectively captures the ambivalence of the Dickensian, challenging some of those associations that have become taken for granted each time a new film adaptation is advertised, or when the word itself is dropped into the news haphazardly. To borrow a critical term employed by Jacklosky in Chapter 6, this volume offers a 'recombinative' approach to authorial afterlives, offering old strands, and new ones, that together create a new understanding of Dickens. By challenging the assumption that readers will always know what Dickensian means, this volume offers many different roads to travel on the journey towards that final meeting with, and understanding of, Dickens, that illuminates our wider cultural interest in literary afterlives, Victorian writers, and the impulse to return.

Endnotes

[1] Eminent Dickens scholars today can still tell stories of struggling to find academics willing to supervise PhD research into Dickens, prior to a resurgence in academic interest in the 1970s. The 1970 special issue of *Dickensian*, 'Dickens and Fame 1870–1970: Essays on the Author's Reputation', provides an overview of the shifts of Dickens's reputation during this period.

[2] As discussed by the Boz Club; see *Boz Club Papers*, 1904, Gimbel-Dickens Collection H59. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

[3] For a fuller exploration of these two institutions, see Emily Bell, 'The Dickens Family, the Boz Club and the Fellowship,' *Dickensian*, vol. 113, no. 3, 2017: pp. 219–32.

[4] See Emma Curry, 'Doing the Novel in Different Voices: Reflections on a Dickensian Twitter Experiment.' *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, vol. 21, 2015: n.pag. http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.736. Accessed 29 Nov. 2019.

[5] See Jeremy Parrott, 'The Annotated Set of *All the Year Round*: Questions, Answers and Conjectures', *Dickensian*, vol. 112, no. 1, 2016: pp. 10–21.

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CHAPTER 1

'Once upon a time would not prove to be All-time or even a long time.' From Sanitary Reform to Cultural Memory: The Case of Jacob's Island

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Repurposed 19th-century warehouses, mid-20th-century social housing, and 21st-century flats and offices now occupy Jacob's Island: the site that Charles Dickens describes in *Oliver Twist* (1837–39) as 'the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London' (416). Even the topography has changed. The tidal waterways that previously surrounded the district have been filled in.[1] One accessed the site by crossing rickety wooden bridges, and, once inside, streams and canals further cross-sectioned this 'small but densely populated place' (Lees Bell 36). The inlets from the Thames formerly served an industry of watermills, but, by the time that Dickens made Jacob's Island the setting for Bill Sikes's death, these waterways had become open sewers that received the inhabitants' household waste and effluvia.[2] It is also likely that the water would have been contaminated by adjacent tanneries.[3] At the very least, the use of manure during the manufacture of leather would have exacerbated its already malodorous conditions.

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Off the beaten track, and long neglected by civic bodies, Dickens even claims that Jacob's Island is 'wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of [London's] inhabitants' (*OT* 416).

Jacob's Island was far from obscure by the mid-19th century, however. During the 1840s the district was repeatedly investigated by social explorers, and by the 1850s it had been invested with an almost symbolic significance in parliamentary and committee debates about metropolitan sanitary reform. Lord Ashley (later Shaftsbury) singled out Jacob's Island in a discussion about the 'Sanitary State of the Metropolis' in 1852, for instance, calling it a 'famous place … of a most disgusting description' (1292). In the popular press, too, references to Jacob's Island connoted dangerously insanitary conditions. For, having been linked to outbreaks of cholera in 1832 and 1848, and named 'the very capital of cholera' by Henry Mayhew ('A Visit to the Cholera Districts of Bermondsey' 4), Jacob's Island represented a threat to London as a whole. Although how disease spread was still improperly understood, leading sanitary reformers, such as Edwin Chadwick, stressed that improving urban living conditions was vital to successfully combatting public health issues associated with poor sanitation and contaminated water. It is easy to see why Dickens's description of Jacob's Island was pertinent to such concerns. *Oliver Twist* anticipates the currents of the mid-century sanitary movement in its stress on the area's 'confined' living quarters, 'tainted' air, and the 'muddy ditch[es]' from which the inhabitants 'haul the[ir] water up' (417). The site's notoriety was thus reinforced by fiction and non-fiction alike, and campaigns for its reform frequently comingle references to both creative and apparently factual writing.

Dickens's description of Jacob's Island is regularly quoted in articles arguing for the area's 'improvement' – the term commonly applied to large-scale urban redevelopment in the 19th century, which often included mass demolitions to clear slum housing or build new infrastructure. In an article exploring 'Modern Bermondsey' in 1842, for instance, George Dodd quotes from *Oliver Twist* at length. In the novel, he asserts, 'the features which this spot presents are described so vividly, and with such close accuracy, that we cannot do better than quote the passage' (20). As I will go on to explore, Dodd – as well as other writers and campaigners – evoked *Oliver Twist* to substantiate and reinforce his own criticisms of the area's insanitary state. Dickens's impact on the perceived identity of Jacob's Island was considerable. The Rev. W. Lees Bell's later *History of Bermondsey* (1880) even opined that *Oliver Twist* had spurred a groundswell of concern that drove the site's redevelopment to almost as significant a degree as the cholera outbreak:[4]

> what popular writers and newspaper articles could not do the Cholera did, and in 1850 the crazy houses were pulled down, the ditches or canals filled up, and the Mill Stream and Neckinger arched over. (42–3)

Lees Bell is right to note that the version of this area provided by 'the pen of Dickens' dominated the site's popular representation both prior to initial improvements made in 1850 and after its demolition (40). Sanitary reforms

were made in Jacob's Island in a piecemeal fashion: the tidal ditches were gradually filled in, and dilapidated housing was eventually torn down and replaced by warehouses. Even as the city changed, however, the same passage from *Oliver Twist* was quoted repeatedly in subsequent descriptions.[5] These literary afterlives reveal ongoing intersections between written representation and the material processes of urban redevelopment, as both Dickens's novel and other writers' accounts (especially Mayhew's famous *exposé* for the *Morning Chronicle*) were recalled and reprinted throughout the area's improvement.

Even though *Oliver Twist* was used as a rhetorical tool to argue for the site's redevelopment from the 1840s to the 1860s, the text quickly ceased to be treated as an urgent call for sanitary reform thereafter. As early as the 1870s, press commentators responded to the area's physical alteration and evoked *Oliver Twist* as a record of a bygone city. By the 1880s, artists and writers nostalgically reimagined Dickens's account of the site in an urban picturesque mode. Then, in the 20th century, another mass redevelopment of the area triggered more wistful yearning for Dickens's London. Consequently, as this chapter will argue, we can trace Dickensian afterlives both in the cultural processes by which the history of Jacob's Island has been constructed and in the processes which drove its material destruction earlier in the 19th century.

Dickensian afterlives can take many different forms, as the subsequent chapters in this volume will show: adaptations in different media; quotations or allusions to Dickens in other works; images inspired by his stories or characters; material culture; heritage sites; guided walks; and so on. Today, it is easiest to locate the material afterlives of Dickens's fiction in the preservation of historic buildings,[6] or in retrospective reimaginings of the built environment through heritage trails or Dickensian street names. However, what this chapter suggests, and I have argued in *Dickens and Demolition* in greater depth, is that Dickensian afterlives are traceable in what is missing, as well as what is created or preserved. As I will go on to show, *Oliver Twist* was repeatedly used in campaigns for sanitary reform in Jacob's Island, which was effected, in part, by demolishing outdated buildings. By locating Dickens's material legacy in areas of London that have been demolished, as well as those that have been preserved, this chapter emphasises how imaginative worlds linger in physical spaces in unexpected, practical ways, and in so doing extend the parameters of what we conceive as literary afterlives.

Tracing Dickensian afterlives makes it possible to see processes through which cultural memories about Jacob's Island have been constructed. The concept of cultural memory is a means of analysing how stories about the past are created, disseminated, and accepted as a shared cultural heritage. We discern the significance of *Oliver Twist* to cultural memories of Jacob's Island because it was repeatedly evoked as a representation of the area's past across multiple media and fora. Nonetheless, while literary afterlives are frequently used to implant a sense of a common history or cultural heritage,[7] the different ways that texts are reimagined in multiple media means that literary afterlives simultaneously

reveal these cultural memories are far from stable. As Anne Rigney puts it, '[t]hese memory sites are not fixed entities or finished products … but rather imaginative resources for generating new meanings and contesting old ones' (19). The different ways in which the same passage from *Oliver Twist* was reimagined to portray a specific place gives textual form to these cultural processes. Conversely, the fact that the novel was also frequently evoked in arguments for its material improvement earlier in the 19th century changes the stakes in its later historicisation. In fact, the tracking of Dickensian afterlives reveals how literary narratives have been used to obscure the social impact of urban developments both during and after its improvement.

Dickens's writing was central to the reappraisal of Jacob's Island as a lost relic of a former time, just as it had been to arguments for the site's demolition. Indeed, its identity was reimagined so rapidly that there were temporal and imaginative overlaps between appropriations that used *Oliver Twist* to argue for contemporary urban reforms and those that evoked the same passage as a historical reference point. Moreover, imaginative reappraisals of Jacob's Island as a historical relic were published before its material redevelopment was complete. In locating and analysing Dickensian afterlives at each stage of the area's progress – from being defined as a contemporary problem site to one which inspired nostalgic sentiment – this chapter explores the role of literature in negotiating contemporary social anxieties connected with slums, but then moves on to examine its part in narrating, manipulating, and eclipsing the cultural and social histories of Jacob's Island and its communities. Where demolished sites that have been (and still are) commonly associated with, and represented through, Dickens's works – like Jacob's Island – Dickensian simulacra have come to stand for their cultural history and displaced inhabitants. It is difficult to find traces of the actual people who lived in these slum areas, but Dickensian afterlives survive in abundance. Despite Dickens's reputation as *the* champion of the urban poor, the ways that Dickensian afterlives have been used to campaign for and then historicise metropolitan improvements implicate his work first in displacing members of London's poor population (when the areas they lived in were redeveloped), and then in obscuring these people from view, as their living memories are veiled by literary characters and imagery. The material and social afterlives of Dickens's fiction in the case of Jacob's Island are thus opposite to his vision for greater social equality in London.

Demolishing Jacob's Island

From the early 1840s on, Dickens was widely credited with alerting the reading public to the existence of Jacob's Island. Other writers regularly quote and allude to *Oliver Twist* in their accounts of the district. Dodd even remarks on the significance of Dickens's description to public images of the area:

> All Londoners have heard of the 'Rookery,' or, more irreverently, the 'Holy Land' of St. Giles's; … [but] far less is known of 'Jacob's Island' in Bermondsey, though it has been rendered familiar to many by the most successful of living novelists. (20)

Dickens's representation of Jacob's Island was certainly well known by the time Dodd published his article 'Modern Bermondsey' in 1842, but *Oliver Twist* was in fact preceded by Robert Wilkinson's *Londina Illustrata* (1819). Wilkinson's book offers an engraving showing a 'South View of London Street, Dockhead, in the Water Side Division of the Parish of St Mary Magdalen Bermondsey. SURREY' (n.pag.), alongside a map of the district. The scene is dilapidated and follows an illustration of buildings that were about to be demolished in the Strand. The condition of Jacob's Island and its position in the volume thus indicate that similar destruction is predicted in London Street. In juxtaposing these images, Wilkinson presents both scenes as records of London's past. As early as 1819, therefore, the place was interpreted as a relic of Old London and drawn in a style that anticipates the *Illustrated London News*'s picturesque representation of urban demolitions in the 1850s and 60s.[8] However, the impact that *Londina Illustrata* had on how Jacob's Island was popularly perceived appears to have been limited. The book is a hefty, richly illustrated tome, beyond the means of many readers. *Oliver Twist* was a more useful point of reference for mid-century social explorers. Aside from the novel's popular appeal, which allowed later users to mine the story for widely recognisable representational tools, its pertinence to current sanitary concerns in the 1840s meant that it was evoked as commentary on contemporary London, rather than a record of its past.

Dodd presents *Oliver Twist* as evidence that supports his call for sanitary reform in Jacob's Island. His narrative is framed as a walk around Bermondsey and maps his route by recounting street names and landmarks. Titled 'Modern Bermondsey', Dodd celebrates the area's industrial progress by describing the variety and vitality of trades and manufactures based in the district. His criticism of Jacob's Island is thereby accentuated because its degenerated conditions are in close proximity to thriving industries. Dodd's meticulously observed portrayal is purportedly taken from the objective standpoint of a strolling visitor to the district. He affects a disinterested tone and foregrounds his critical praxis by evaluating the conclusions he draws from first-hand observation against secondary sources. One of these is *Oliver Twist*. Reading Dickens is presented as part of Dodd's wider research, and so the novel is presented as giving a faithful and realistic depiction of contemporary London. 'This is the scene', he attests, inbetween quoting long extracts from the novel (Dodd 20). Dodd's self-representation as a first-hand observer indicates that quoting from *Oliver Twist* was less an attempt to enliven his own writing than to corroborate his claims. Fiction is represented as urban reportage – an interpretation that Dodd substantiates by comparing it to other accounts. He notes its similarity to the 'view

of this spot' given in *Londina Illustrata*, for example: 'the interval of time does not seem to have produced much change in the appearance of the scene' (Dodd 21). In fact, Wilkinson's antiquarianism is distinct from Dodd's and Dickens's portrayal of Jacob's Island as a modern problem site. Nevertheless, reference to multiple texts allows Dodd to cast *Oliver Twist* as part of his wider critical analysis of the district, so justifying its significance to his investigations.

In 1846, Angus B. Reach affected a similarly analytical approach in *London Penetralia*, but aligned *Oliver Twist* even more explicitly with contemporary arguments for sanitary reform than Dodd had done four years earlier. Reach vociferously criticises the fact that local government bodies tolerate the insanitary conditions in Jacob's Island. In particular, he draws the reader's attention to the dangerously polluted water that inhabitants are forced to drink: 'It required a little screwing up, but we tasted the loathsome fluid. Earthy, nauseously mawkish, its savour was of the sepulchre' (Reach 14). Reach's ingestion of the water has a shocking and repulsive effect, as it prompts the reader to imagine what other substances are dissolved in the liquid. Yet, despite his avowed commitment to first-hand research and an evident desire to shock, Reach still supports his claims by quoting long extracts from *Oliver Twist*. Perhaps he was merely attempting to ride on Dickens's coattails by associating his writing with such a popular author. Although Dodd was a reasonably successful journeyman writer,[9] Reach struggled to make a living despite working 'sixteen hours a day as a shorthand reporter, comic writer, and novelist' (Douglas-Fairhurst 144). Nevertheless, Reach's self-construction as a social explorer in turn presents *London Penetralia* as a critique of contemporary metropolitan conditions. Dickens's writing was thus repeatedly re-presented as urban reportage, to supplement and authenticate later writers' apparently first-hand research.

In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens layers topographic and social description with sensational details that heighten the narrative tension of this climactic scene. Jacob's Island is the setting for Sikes's attempted escape. It is portrayed as a pestiferous slum, and so is dangerous both because of its insanitary conditions and because it shelters a community of desperate criminals: 'They must have powerful motives for a secret residence, or be reduced to a destitute condition indeed, who seek a refuge in Jacob's Island' (*OT* 418). The distance between Jacob's Island and wealthier areas in London is thereby presented as both geographic and social. 'To reach this place,' Dickens's narrator explains, 'the visitor has to penetrate through a maze of close, narrow, and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and poorest of water-side people, and devoted to the traffic they may be supposed to occasion' (416). The terrain and its populace appear to obstruct easy access. Sikes's retreat to Jacob's Island makes his capture more unlikely, and so increases the reader's sense of danger and suspense. Dickens further emphasises the site's difference to other urban spaces by amassing negative superlative adjectives in his account. In the first paragraph alone, Jacob's Island is labelled the 'dirtiest', 'blackest', 'filthiest', 'strangest', and 'most extraordinary' of London's 'hidden' localities (416). While *Oliver Twist* certainly presents a vivid portrayal

of the site's insanitary conditions, therefore, the topography of Jacob's Island also contributes to building narrative tension – something which Dodd and Reach downplay.

In representing *Oliver Twist* as a detailed exploration of contemporary slum conditions, Dodd and Reach construct Dickens's identity as an expert on contemporary London: a persona pertinent to the mid-century public health movement. As Lauren Goodlad argues, in the early stages of the sanitary movement, a version of the public servant emerged that was 'part hero, part expert', whose 'credentials were predicated on zealous dedication to a social cause and, consequently, on unique and hard-won expertise' (536). These figures were quickly superseded by 'the public school and Oxbridge educated professional' (Goodlad 536); however, Dickens's characterisation as a specialist by the social explorers of the 1840s overlaps with the period in which such men were influential drivers of large-scale urban improvements. Aside from outbreaks of epidemic diseases, Edwin Chadwick's 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* was another significant factor in focusing public attention on sanitary reform in the 1840s.[10] Chadwick was both a public servant and an indefatigable advocate of sanitary reform, who made recommendations based on substantial research. The *Report* envisions systematic assaults on public health problems through practical measures, such as a mass sewerage system to remove noxious waste (Goodlad 531). Metropolitan sewage disposal was not centralised until after the Metropolitan Board of Works was established in 1855, but Chadwick's report contributed to changing public policy about who should be given the authority to plan and implement such measures. The professionalism that social explorers attribute to Dickens suggestively positions imaginative writing in dialogue with official reports that investigated the modern city and made authoritative recommendations for its improvement. Reach even went so far as to say that Jacob's Island was unknown to many Londoners prior to Dickens's account: 'It's [*sic*] name is not even laid down in London maps. Until the appearance of a work of fiction some years ago, probably not one Londoner in ten thousand had ever read or heard of Jacob's Island' (12).[11] Reach's assertion that *Oliver Twist* had been useful in mapping modern London aligns Dickens's novel with non-fiction documents that sought to measure and account for contemporary conditions through statistics or cartography.[12] Nevertheless, even though Reach reinforces his critiques of urban conditions by allying his work with Dickens's supposedly expert insight, the name *London Penetralia* – meaning London's 'secret parts' or 'mysteries' (*Oxford English Dictionary*) – simultaneously evokes a titillating affect. Similarly to Dickens himself, these social investigators explored the pleasures that slum tourism generates for wealthier readers, as well as exposing social injustice.

As in *Oliver Twist*, Dodd's and Reach's accounts layer apparently objective and sensational details. While both quote from the novel as a faithful portrayal of the district, they also take cues from Dickens's emotive vocabulary.

In addition to republishing long extracts, Dodd's own commentary patterns Dickens's dramatic model of urban description. Depicting Jacob's Island 'in all its ragged glory', Dodd draws readers' attention to 'mean and dilapidated houses' and 'small, crazy, and very primitive wooden bridges' (20). This reinforces the details given in the novel. *Oliver Twist* also emphasises the cramped, dirty and dilapidated condition of the built environment: 'rooms so small, so filthy, so confined … dirt-besmeared walls and decaying foundations' (417). Dodd even directly mimics some of Dickens's more emphatic adjectival choices. For example, Dodd's use of the word 'crazy' to describe the ramshackle wooden bridges follows Dickens's description of '[c]razy wooden galleries' (*OT* 417). In contrast to the formal tone and careful diction he employs to describe Bermondsey's industries, his account adopts a sensational tenor when he enters Jacob's Island. Consequently, he presents the site's obscurity as intriguing as well as dangerous. Reach also draws on the novel by employing comparable diction ('crazy' features again) and laying emphasis on similar features of the scene:

> Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half-a-dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime beneath; … wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud and threatening to fall into it – as some have done … . (*OT* 417)

> Imagine this pestilential ditch bounded, and its reeking banks formed by a long succession of picturesque wooden dwellings, old, crazy, crumbling, in some places leaning heavily over the mud, in others settling down bodily into it. (*London Penetralia* 12)

Dodd and Reach give a low profile to the topography's narrative role when they refer to Dickens's novel as a form of urban investigative journalism. However, corollaries between their accounts and Dickens's description reveal that these later social explorers still sought to satisfy readers' tastes for sensational criminal scenes, at the same time as providing hard-hitting information about contemporary conditions.

In contrast to Dodd's and Reach's earlier studies, Dickens is notably absent from Henry Mayhew's famous report for the *Morning Chronicle* (1849).[13] Unlike previous social explorers, Mayhew's decision not to refer to *Oliver Twist* presents his report as a different kind of urban investigation, unmediated by fiction. This is not to say that Mayhew pretended not to have textual predecessors, but rather that he constructed a different literary genealogy to Dodd and Reach. Instead of extracting passages from Dickens's novel to support and inform his representation of Jacob's Island, Mayhew only alludes to reports that were supposedly based on fact. Mayhew quotes from *London Penetralia*, which, like the *Morning Chronicle* article, argues for contemporary sanitary reform based on personal examinations of the area.[14] Still, Dickens is indirectly present in Mayhew's account because Reach's representation of Jacob's Island was

informed by *Oliver Twist*. Dickensian afterlives in 1840s social exploration thus mean that the novel still shadows the *Morning Chronicle* article.

Fictional and investigative writing had a greater impact on how Jacob's Island was popularly perceived than official reports. Although ultimately the site's redevelopment was triggered by the 1848–49 cholera epidemic, the 'Report of the General Board of Health on the Epidemic Cholera of 1848 & 1849' (1850) deals with the area south of the river more broadly than the social explorers writing in the 1840s.

> Thus estimating the intensity of the epidemic force by the amount of mortality from cholera and diarrhœa, proportionably [*sic*] to every 1,000 living, it appears that Rotherhithe, which was the first in the order of mortality in the late, was only the ninth in the former epidemic; Bermondsey, the second in the late, was the fourth in the former; Southwark, the third in the late, was the first in the former; and Newington, the fourth in the late, was the sixth in the former epidemic, and so on. (Ashley Cooper 'Report of the General Board of Health' 24)

Mayhew's famous article, 'A Visit to the Cholera Districts of Bermondsey', is different to the General Board of Health's report in that it specifically identifies Jacob's Island as 'the very capital of cholera' (4). Conversely, the report indicates that Bermondsey did not have the highest mortality rate during the 1848–49 epidemic. While the report corroborates Mayhew's claim that death tolls in the area were high, Jacob's Island was not the centre point of the cholera outbreak that he suggests. Nevertheless, his article, and those of other social explorers from whom Mayhew quoted, certainly contributed to calls for sanitary reform in the district at a time when public anxieties were focused by fears about cholera and other deadly diseases. This is measurable in the fact that, by the 1850s, Jacob's Island was repeatedly evoked in parliament to advocate public health measures, such as the Metropolis Water Act (1852), which legislated for the increased provision of clean water in London.[15] Jacob's Island remained an exemplar of poor sanitation even after material reforms began in 1850.

Reimagining Jacob's Island

The role that Dickensian afterlives performed in later representations of Jacob's Island changed when the social issues associated with the place appeared less pressing. Prior to the 1870s, Dickens's description of Jacob's Island had been repurposed as evidence of urgently needed sanitary improvements. After his death in 1870, however, Dickens's London was reimagined as a version of a bygone city with astonishing rapidity, and while the material redevelopment of Jacob's Island was still incomplete.

The speed with which Dickens's London was reconceived is revealed by the fact that, in the early 1870s, afterlives that asserted *Oliver Twist*'s contemporary applicability to sanitary reform overlapped, even interacted, with appropriations of the text as a historical record. In 1872, only two years after Dickens's death, the *Ragged School Union Magazine* published an article in which his description of Jacob's Island was used to evoke its past, earlier redevelopment and current conditions, within the same piece. Describing the changes that had occurred in the area over the past two decades, the article states that:

> The foul ditch, a creek of the Thames, has been filled up, and no longer pollutes soul and body. Huge warehouses have replaced the hovels of burglars; … The poor no longer drink the filthy, unfiltered creek-water, for most houses have the water laid on; though the less that is said about the state of the water butts the better. As might have been expected, the moral aspect of Jacob's Island has so changed that the Bill Sikeses would scarcely choose it now for a place of refuge. (35–6)

In reprinting Dickens's description as a historical account, the *Ragged School Union Magazine* draws readers' attention to material changes to Jacob's Island. The novel has historical value, according to the article, because of its dissimilarity to the current physical space. *Oliver Twist* thus allows the writer to construct a legible representation of the site's transformation by measuring the scale and success of the area's redevelopment in comparison to Dickens's fictionalised portrayal. The modern built environment is conceived alongside and through the simultaneous evocation of its past and its fictionalisation. However, Dickensian afterlives also serve a symbolic function, and defy and unsettle the specific spatial and temporal parameters implied by the article's representation of the changing built environment. The plural 'Sikeses' in the above quotation suggests, for example, that Dickens's characters personify wider and ongoing social problems, such as crime. In this, characters are severed from the specific historicisation against which, the article proposes, readers should interpret Dickens's descriptions of London places.

Multiple temporalities and fiction intersect and overlap in the *Ragged School Union Magazine*'s representation of Jacob's Island, but the article goes so far as to argue that there are also reciprocal pathways of exchange between fictional representation and material change. Similarly to earlier commentators, the writer credits Dickens with alerting the public to Jacob's Island's very existence:

> About a quarter of a century ago society was startled by Charles Dickens's sketch of a London 'crime garden.' So little was then known of the haunts of crime, that many believed the fact to be exaggerated. (*Ragged School Union Magazine* 34)

The link between Dickens's fiction and localised improvements is conceived as both imaginative and practical. Noting that *Oliver Twist* had provoked and facilitated further investigations and comment, the writer traces how the fictional representation of Jacob's Island, and its significance to later sanitary campaigns, culminated in material change. For instance, the writer claims that *Oliver Twist* prompted philanthropists to establish the Jacob's Island Ragged School in 1855. Yet the novel is not only used to tell the story of how the Ragged School was founded, its location in the contemporary city is also mapped in relation to the novel. The 'Ragged School', we are told, was opened 'a few yards from Bill Sikes's house' (*Ragged School Union Magazine* 36). The location of Sikes's retreat is not named in *Oliver Twist*. In constructing a representation that comingles fiction with the physical space, the writer consciously embellishes her or his reading of Dickens's account to establish further connections between the novel and the modern city. The effect is that the article implies temporal and spatial continuity and development between Dickens's description and the present day, and so reinforces the assertion of *Oliver Twist*'s significance to the area's redevelopment and the Ragged School's philanthropic activities.

Alluding to *Oliver Twist* allows the *Ragged School Union Magazine*'s writer to justify and explain material improvements in positive terms. She or he evokes *Oliver Twist* as a record of a dark and dangerous past, and as a symbolic vocabulary for certain social problems. The interventions of philanthropists and urban developers can thus be conceived as assaults upon urban disorder and disease – a narrative that obscures the negative social effects of improvement. For the former inhabitants of slum areas, demolition meant displacement.[16] Tenants were given scant, if any, compensation, and little appropriate housing was built to accommodate the people who were forced from their homes. Even though slum clearances were commonly conceived as part of a creative process of necessary urban amelioration, given the inadequate supply of affordable housing for the poor, in reality slum dwellers were forced to pack even more closely into remaining tenements, and at higher rents driven by increased demand. Contrary to Dickens's reputation as champion of the urban poor, the *Ragged School Union Magazine* borrows Dickens's supposed authority as an urban commentator to argue for the benefits of demolishing Jacob's Island. Indeed, as in its claims that *Oliver Twist* inspired the Ragged School's work in the area, the article states that *Oliver Twist* is partially responsible for its wider topographic reform: 'Such a picture could not but lead to some improvement in the sanitary condition of Jacob's Island' (*Ragged School Union Magazine* 35). Written only two years after obituaries had lauded and memorialised Dickens as both a reformer and a writer, the *Ragged School Union Magazine*'s assertion that he had an instrumental impact on changing the material and social conditions of London was not unique. For instance, in the same year that this article was published, John Forster's biography similarly claimed that, 'with only the light arms of humour and laughter, and the gentle ones of pathos and sadness, he carried cleansing and reform into … Augean stables' (157–8).

Throughout the course of its redevelopment, Dickensian afterlives influenced the perceived social identity of Jacob's Island by hiding its real inhabitants from view. The census that was taken closest to its initial improvements suggests that Dickens's characterisation of Jacob's Island's population as transient and nefarious was not representative. The results of the 1851 census reveal a population deeply rooted in the area. In Metcalf Court – which a later writer (H.W. Jackson) believed was the location of Sikes's last hideout – most of the dwellings were arranged into family units and almost all of the men were employed. Jacob's Island was not a waste-ground for human 'refuse' but was inhabited by the labourers and mariners of local waterside industries and their families (*OT* 417). Apart from Frances Price from Sussex, David Davis from South Wales and his wife, Jane Davis, from Kent, all the inhabitants of the Court were born in Bermondsey or its neighbouring parishes. There was also a wide discrepancy in the ages of the inhabitants. The youngest named was just one year old and the oldest was 77; she was not the only septuagenarian ('Bermondsey. *England's Census* [1851]'). As unhealthy as this district undoubtedly was, then, Dickens nonetheless seems to have described its social identity as largely criminal for dramatic effect. His misrepresentation had an effect on the population, however, as his sensational reimagining of the place was later mobilised by other commentators to argue for its improvement.

Dickens critiques the damaging consequences that so-called creative destruction had on the poor elsewhere in his fiction and journalism. In 'On Duty with Inspector Field' (1851), for instance, Dickens angrily complains that: 'we make our New Oxford Streets, and our other new streets, never heeding, never asking, where the wretches whom we clear out, crowd' (267). Yet, contrary to his awareness of social injustices caused by demolitions, the ways that *Oliver Twist* was mobilised to argue for improvement reveal that Dickensian afterlives played a role in driving, or excusing, its effects. The popular images of the site that were circulated in the press and in debates about the area's conditions were constructed and mediated by people without experience of living in the district, who would almost always have been members of middle-class or wealthy social groups. In contrast, no evidence remains to suggest how the population living in Jacob's Island would have represented the district or themselves, or reacted to its improvement. Instead, these people are frequently replaced by fictional figures in later representations, which are deployed to reinforce the area's perceived criminal and destitute identity – as in the *Ragged School Union Magazine*'s reference to the 'Bill Sikeses' who had previously sought refuge there. This not only appears to justify the necessity of demolitions but also disassociates their social impact from real people.

The very recently displaced residents of Jacob's Island were further dislocated from social participation or cultural history when *Oliver Twist* was reimagined as a representation of London's past and evoked as a carrier of cultural memories. Drawing on Pierre Nora's influential *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) concept, Astrid Erll notes that '[s]ites of memory … always point to the absence of living

memory' (24). Indeed, analysis of how Jacob's Island was reimagined through Dickens's description and characters provides a telling example of how cultural memories can efface and eclipse certain social groups. Whether by using characters to define certain communities as Other to a magazine's target readership, or by evoking descriptive passages as exemplary accounts of a shared historical past, a Dickensian vocabulary appealed to, and helped to construct, selective collective identities. Somewhat paradoxically, such appropriations of Dickens built on the assumption that the audience of a given afterlife already recognised the author as a common cultural reference point: a supposition enabled by the popular dissemination of Dickens's works across multiple media, as much as by the fact that reference to Dickens aligns individual reading experiences with those of a wider public. Nevertheless, as in the Ragged School Union Magazine's article, later users envision an audience who survey, but do not participate in, Dickens's scenes. Their knowledge of Jacob's Island as an emblem of London's past is at one remove. By contrast, slum residents are represented as characters in the novel. They are fossilised in an idea of a Dickensian past. Consequently, Dickensian afterlives not only constructed a divisive social vision, they also created cultural memories that replaced lived experiences.

Fiction effaces living memories. There can be no living memory of Dickens's London because it is fictional. Consequently, the articulation of Jacob's Island through Dickensian afterlives effects the deliberate removal of certain social histories. It is a critical truism to say that cultural memories are as dependent on forgetting as remembering: 'In processing our experience of reality, forgetting is the rule and remembering the exception' (Erll 9). In the case of Jacob's Island, Dickensian afterlives are this exception; however, their fictional genesis signals a fracture between representations of space and lived space. This is reinforced by the fact that later commentators frequently deployed Dickensian afterlives to illustrate a contrast between the site's past and present. Literary allusion marks a break with the possibility of preserving a 'true picture of the past' – which Walter Benjamin conceives as 'flashes' that bid their 'final farewell in the moment of its recognisability' (thesis V) – rather than a means of conceptualising a historical continuum.

The cultural memories produced via Dickensian afterlives changed as further alterations to the built environment permitted Dickens's London to be nostalgically reimagined as a version of Old London. As early as the 1880s, Dickensian afterlives were produced that reconceived his portrayal of Jacob's Island in a picturesque style that emphasised its disconnectedness from modern London. In 1887, less than two decades after the writer's death, James Lawson Stewart painted a series of watercolour scenes from Dickens's novels in an urban picturesque mode. Stewart's representation of Jacob's Island both clings to and departs from Dickens's text (see Figure 1.1). Some of the details of the scene are reasonably coherent with those in Dickens's description: 'Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half-a-dozen houses' line a waterway faced by 'windows broken and patched' (*OT* 417). Stewart's painting preserves the dilapidation in Dickens's account; however, it is drawn in a comfortably picturesque

Figure 1.1: ***Jacob's Island, Rotherhithe***, 1887 by J.L. Stewart. © Museum of London, reprinted with permission.

rather than a threateningly noxious style. Depicting scenes characterised by 'contrast rather than … unity, … irregularity rather than … continuity, and … the fragment rather than … the whole' (Nead 32), Stewart's urban aesthetic follows 18th century picturesque art. The jumbled houses are pleasantly irregular, the sepia tones are easy on the eye and the vanishing point is positioned off centre, giving a piquant unpredictability to the environment. In contrast to Dickens's account, there is no indication that the area is dangerously polluted. Strollers cross the bridge in apparently amicable conversation while another person purposefully carries goods in a basket on her head. There is even a duck swimming on the waterway. If anything, it is the duck that signals the greatest single departure from Dickens's disgust at Jacob's Island's insanitary conditions and the 'slime' and 'mud' of Folly Ditch (*OT* 417). Stewart's representation encourages the viewer to enjoy the scene, indicating a desire to linger in Dickens's London, like the strollers crossing the bridge in the painting.

Stewart's nostalgia conveys a sanitised vision of Old London, which eschews the dangerous connotations associated with dilapidated urban areas earlier in the 19th century. His reimagining of Dickens's scene was thereby permitted, in part, because the description in *Oliver Twist* no longer had a material counterpart. Like the ruins that were frequently the subject of picturesque art, the pleasure of viewing these images had to be 'at one remove' from the present, and 'softened by art' (Macaulay 454–5). In other words, the viewer's aesthetic pleasure in dilapidated urban scenes would surely have been dampened if it could be seen to threaten another cholera outbreak. By the late 1880s, Stewart

had no need to continue to agitate for topographic or sanitary reform. The social and environmental implications of *Oliver Twist*, and of its afterlives up to the 1870s, were effaced concurrently with the demolition of Jacob's Island. Stewart's nostalgic retrospective of the site and Dickens's fiction was therefore enabled by its material redevelopment.

The role Dickensian afterlives played in the construction of cultural memories was again reconceived when Jacob's Island was demolished wholesale in the early 20th century. In the 1920s, three and a half acres of south London, including Jacob's Island, were destroyed. Instead of sparking positive narratives about the site's material progress, however, newspaper reports portray the demolition as a loss, because it would erase a perceived link between the site and Dickens's novels. Their headlines include: 'London to Lose Link with Dickens', 'Dickens' "Jacob's Island" To Go', 'Where Bill Sikes Died. House to be Removed by L.C.C. Scheme of Demolition' (*Press Cuttings File: Bermondsey*; 'Where Bill Sikes Died' 7). Again obscuring the area's population and industries from view, these afterlives show that the imaginative association between *Oliver Twist* and Jacob's Island endured throughout numerous processes of material change in the district. Moreover, the impact that *Oliver Twist* had on how improvements were conceived is proven by the proliferation of Dickensian afterlives across multiple media and official and unofficial documents. An article in the *Southwark and Bermondsey Recorder* even states that Dickens's fiction was included in cartographic plans:

> Some doubt has hitherto existed as to the precise position of the house where Sikes died, but all doubts have been set at rest by Mr. G. W. Mitchell, a clerk, at Bermondsey Town Hall, who, when engaged on revising drainage plans at the offices of the London County Council, discovered one dated April 5th, 1855, on which was marked the house – one of the many 'cribs,' where Fagan [*sic*], the Jew, Bill Sikes, the robber, and their evil associates often met. … The house was at the back of what is now No. 18, Eckett-street, then known as Edward-street, in a court named Metcalf Court, which has been swept away, and is now occupied by the stables and yard of Messrs. R. Chambers and Co., Carmen contractors. (Jackson 1)

Rediscovered during the planning of the 1920s demolitions, these drainage plans were found serendipitously but not randomly. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate the documents within the course of my research; nevertheless, the discovery was reported in several newspapers, including *The Times* ('Where Bill Sikes Died' 7). The remediation of *Oliver Twist* across these numerous contexts and channels shows that fiction was enmeshed in dialectical relations with how the city was conceived. Moreover, given that the exact location of Sikes's death is not named in the novel, Dickensian afterlives extend what details are made available in the text, and so continue to revise these relations between the material and the literary.

Even when afterlives selectively appropriate or alter the text, its various incarnations reveal that *Oliver Twist* has helped to define Jacob's Island's cultural identity ever since the novel was published – even though it also contributed to arguments for its demolition, which effaced the conditions it describes. By the end of the 19th century, the built environment did not contain relics of the cityscape that had inspired Dickens's representation. Warehouses replaced the crazy dwellings and the ditches were filled up. Aleida Assmann has argued, however, that passing on stories is fundamental to the way we construct cultural memories and interpret our material world.

> The shattered fragments of a lost or destroyed way of life are used to authenticate stories that in turn become reference points for a new cultural memory. That places require explanation, and their relevance and meaning can only be maintained through stories that are continuously transmitted. (Assmann 292)

Dickens's significance to cultural memories of Jacob's Island is thus reinforced by the reproducibility and apparent constancy of his description, in contrast to the non-presence of the built environment he describes. Nevertheless, such uses of Dickensian afterlives also effect acts of violence, as they can manipulate how the site's previous residents are perceived, or erase them from cultural history. By contrast, literary tourism continues to reinforce Jacob's Island's association with Dickens to this day. Plaques erected in the area by Southwark Borough Council register its association with *Oliver Twist* and embed references to the novel in a heritage trail in the district. Tracing Dickensian afterlives about Jacob's Island thus enables us to perceive how literature still affects how we conceive and construct the past and, through this, London's contemporary built environment.

Endnotes

[1] 'The boundaries of this district on the West and North are St. Saviour's Dock and the Thames bank, which here begins to be called "Bermondsey Wall." On the South it is bounded by Dockhead and the road towards Rotherhithe, whilst on the east it is encircled by a tidal stream called the Neckinger' (Lees Bell 37).

[2] Tales of the area's history vary, highlighting the obscurity of its past. Angus B. Reach explains in *London Penetralia* that monks had worked an industry of watermills on the site, part of which was later transformed into a semi-rural place of retreat called Cupid's Gardens, probably in the early modern period (16). However, Rev. W. Lees Bell states that 'what history it may have commences with the reign of Queen Anne' (36–7).

[3] A map held in the Southwark Local History Library and Archive reveals a concentration of tanning pits located in close proximity to Jacob's Island, particularly along Long Lane and Spa Road.

[4] The Reverend W. Lees Bell was vicar of the parish of Christ Church in Bermondsey. A huge increase in the population of Bermondsey in the 19th century necessitated the formation of several new parishes (Malden). Although originally in the parish of St Mary Magdalen in Bermondsey, Jacob's Island was united with some other impoverished neighbouring areas in 1848 to make the new parish of Christ Church (Lees Bell 43).

[5] Another reason that Dickens's description may have been able to adopt such imaginative authority in the case of Jacob's Island was because of discrepancies between other accounts. Reports detailing the area in the 19th century are generally uncertain about Jacob's Island's specific location, variously attributing it to the districts of Bermondsey or Rotherhithe.

[6] Ruth Richardson's recent efforts to save the Cleveland Street workhouse from redevelopment were materially assisted by her discovery of its association with Dickens (see *Dickens and the Workhouse*, OUP, 2012).

[7] In *The Afterlives of Walter Scott* (OUP, 2012), Rigney discusses how frequently literary names were chosen as place names in colonial territories in the 19th century. She argues that this 'was a way of implanting a sense of history in new urban environments and of nostalgically flagging a collective affiliation to an imagined history in newly settled territories' (1).

[8] Lynda Nead discusses the *Illustrated London News*'s representation of urban improvements in *Victorian Babylon*, Yale UP, 2005: pp. 29–31.

[9] Dodd wrote extensively for high-quality, popular periodicals, including 65 pieces for *Household Words* (see *Dickens Journals Online*).

[10] Edwin Chadwick was not the only government official to publish extensive reports. Another member of the General Board of Health (the centralised government body in charge of sanitary measures in the mid-19th century) to publish his investigations into urban sanitation was Dr Thomas Southwood Smith. Dickens supported Southwood Smith's conclusions. After reading Southwood Smith's report 'On Extramural Sepulture [*sic*]' (1850), for example, Dickens wrote to congratulate him on this 'monument of good sense, moderate reasoning to demonstration, and noble feeling' (*Letters* 6:51).

[11] Searching the records of trials at the Old Bailey reveals no mention of Jacob's Island. However, specific streets in that area are named, usually in relation to crimes of theft. For instance, in March 1839 William Watson, a resident of the area, was found guilty of stealing shirts and imprisoned for six months (*Old Bailey Proceedings Online*). While *Oliver Twist* may have brought the name 'Jacob's Island' into common usage, then, the area was not as invisible to London's populace as Reach suggests.

[12] In *Victorian Babylon*, Nead argues that 19th-century writers referred to statistical analysis in textual accounts of the city in attempts to understand

and represent the rapidly expanding city. However, it remained difficult to comprehend the city's vastness: 'Rather than offering any numerical truth about the city … these statistics evoked a poetic image of London as an immense open-mouthed body, consuming everything that comes within its grasp' (15).

[13] Mayhew does, however, quote Dickens elsewhere in *London Labour and the London Poor*. In 'Of Second-hand Store Shops', for instance, he refers to Dickens as 'one of the most minute and truthful of observers' (2:24).

[14] Intersections between Reach's and Mayhew's writings are somewhat to be expected. Mayhew's 'Visit to the Cholera Districts of Bermondsey' was written in his role as 'Metropolitan Correspondent' for the *Morning Chronicle*. Reach was Mayhew's colleague. The *Morning Chronicle* sent correspondents to enquire into the 'Condition of England' in diverse regions. Reach was correspondent for the manufacturing districts at the same time as Mayhew pursued his metropolitan investigations.

[15] See, for instance, *Hansard*, 3rd ser., vol. 117 (5 June 1851), c. 463.

[16] I give a more detailed explanation of these contexts in Chapter 1 of *Dickens and Demolition*. Discussed here with permission from Edinburgh University Press.

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CHAPTER 2

Nordic Dickens: Dickensian Resonances in the Work of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

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On 19 March 1870, the *Illustrated London News* reported on the last of Charles Dickens's farewell readings at St. James's Hall ('Mr. Chas Dickens's Farewell Reading' 301). Three weeks later, *Norsk Folkeblad* featured this same article, translated into Norwegian ('Charles Dickens's Sidste Oplaesning' 1). At that time, the editor of *Norsk Folkeblad* was the 38-year-old journalist, novelist, and playwright Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. He recognised the importance of this event and, unlike his English counterpart, he made it front-page news. Bjørnson reproduced both the iconic image of the famous writer at his reading desk and the words of Dickens's brief curtain speech wherein he bade farewell to his adoring public. Dickens's novels and journals had long been widely read in Norway, first in German and French translations, later in Danish or Swedish. *Sketches by Boz* (1836) was popular because of its representation of English customs, especially among the lower classes: one of its tales, 'Mr Minns and his Cousin', was included on the English syllabus of Norwegian schools from as early as 1854 (Rem 413). *American Notes* (1842) was also much discussed on account of the rising numbers of Norwegian emigrants crossing the Atlantic.[1] Written Danish and Norwegian were virtually the same language in the

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19th century, so in 1849–50 Norwegian readers could follow the serialisation of *David Copperfield* in the Copenhagen daily paper *Faedrelandet* at almost the same time as the original monthly numbers were being published in London (Ewbank 299). By the early 1870s, Dickens's complete works had been translated into Danish by Ludwig Moltke, making his *oeuvre* widely accessible to Norwegian readers (Schlicke 568). When Dickens died, only two months after Bjørnson's newspaper article, the Norwegian people mourned him deeply; no other non-Scandinavian author, before or since, has received such heartfelt tributes.

Bjørnson's response to Dickens

The so-called 'big four' in 19th-century Norwegian literary history, Bjørnson (1832–1910), Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), Jonas Lie (1833–1908), and Alexander L. Kielland (1849–1906) were all influenced by Dickens's work to varying degrees (Rem 414–16), but Bjørnson is notable within this group as the one who responded with sustained critique rather than homage. By the date of the newspaper article, Bjørnson was established as a well-known writer, but, more controversially, as a radical agitator in the cause of Norwegian independence. Norway had had a complicated political history since the passing of her last native-born king in 1387. Thereafter, she had been caught in a mesh of Scandinavian politics which brought her into union with Denmark or Sweden or, at times, with both countries. From 1536, Norway was subject to Danish rule, only in 1814 to be ceded by Denmark to the king of Sweden. In the first decades after 1814, Norway was backward economically and intellectually and more isolated than ever before, or later. As a result, the rate of emigration to America grew steadily, reaching an unprecedented peak between 1866 and 1873, when 110,896 Norwegians tried their fortunes in the New World (Larsen 467). In order to focus Norwegian attention onto its own history and society, Bjørnson gave his people a whole literature, including the national anthem 'Ja vi elsker dette landet' ('Yes, We Love This Country'), folk tales of peasant life, dramas based on Norway's medieval history, and the new genre of social dramas of contemporary life introduced by him in the 1870s, exposing corruption in politics and journalism (*The Editor* 1874) and in business (*The Bankrupt* 1875), as well as challenging the double standard in marriage (*A Gauntlet* 1883).[2] He believed that, for Norway to develop, the contribution of educated and self-reliant women was essential, hence his fictional depiction of females who develop strength and courage by overcoming challenges of many kinds. Bjørnson strove for the emancipation of the motherland and for her female population;[3] it was his feminist outlook that set Bjørnson on a collision course with Dickens, who was well known for his limiting portrayal of women.

The popularity of Dickens's novels in Norway worked subtly against Bjørnson's political and social aims in two ways. First, Britain was an imperialist power that, like Sweden, colonised weaker nations; by the ready availability of Dickens's writing, Norwegian readers became engrossed in English customs and manners and were distracted from Bjørnson's focus on native culture. Second, Dickens's promotion of the traditional domestic ideal undermined Bjørnson's efforts to galvanise Norwegian women into independent thought and action. As demonstrated by Michael Slater in *Dickens and Women* (1983) and by Patricia Ingham in *Dickens, Women and Language* (1992), Dickens created a spectrum of female stereotypes that incorporated dysfunctional mothers, from the comically garrulous Mrs Nickleby to the sinister Mrs Clennam, asexual pre-pubescent girls from the dollish Dora Spenlow to the saintly Agnes Wickfield, angelic 'orphans' from Little Nell to Esther Summerson, fallen women from the penitent Nancy to the stainless Little Em'ly, and public campaigners like the strident Mrs Pardiggle and the obsessed Mrs Jellyby.[4] Dickens's stereotypes quickly hardened into 'species' of women, instantly definable by a name. The name Mrs Jellyby, for example, became synonymous in modern journalism with any working woman believed to be neglecting her family. She appears, invariably in a negative light, in such articles as 'Are Clever Women Good Housewives?' (*Illustrated Household Journal* 1880) and 'Should Married Women Engage in Public Work?' (*Woman at Home* 1891). As George Henry Lewes commented in 1872:

> Universal experiences became individualised in these types; an image and a name were given, and the image was so suggestive that it seemed to *express* all that it was found to *recall*, and Dickens was held to have depicted what his readers supplied. Against such power criticism was almost idle. ('Dickens in Relation to Criticism' 145)

Against such power, however, Bjørnson strove to challenge assumptions that trapped 19th-century women into attitudes of submission and positions of inequality.

Bjørnson and Dickens's common experiences

Despite the cultural differences and the 20 years that separated their births, Bjørnson and Dickens shared many similar experiences in their family lives and careers. Both knew physical and emotional hardship in childhood, and thereafter interrogated parent–child relationships in their fiction.[5] Both gained an insight into government through working as political journalists early in their careers: from 1832 to 1834, Dickens was employed by *The Mirror of Parliament* to cover debates in the House of Commons, and from 1854 to 1856

Bjørnson worked as a correspondent for *Christiania-Posten*, reporting on the Lagting (Upper House) of the Norwegian parliament. Both began their publishing careers in their mid-twenties by concentrating on the lives of ordinary people: writing as 'Boz', Dickens's short pieces (published 1833–36) described the unseen lives of the London poor, while Bjørnson's rustic tales (launched in 1857) brought the unnoticed lives of the peasants to the foreground. Both worked as journal or newspaper editors: Dickens founded and edited *Household Words* (1850–59) and *All the Year Round* (1859–70), while Bjørnson edited *Norsk Folkeblad* and *Illustreret Folkeblad*, and co-edited *Aftenbladet*, though for much shorter periods; this role provided both men an opportunity to comment on national affairs. Both were passionate about theatre: Dickens involved himself in amateur theatricals, acting, producing, and directing, and displaying his knowledge of the stage in works like *Nicholas Nickleby*, while Bjørnson was a prolific playwright and directed several of his own stage plays. Both used fiction as a tool for social reform, highlighting abuses in political, religious, and educational institutions, while at the same time aiming to challenge the conscience of the individual reader. Both men distanced themselves from church dogma, but retained a belief in God as a force for good. It is possible that Bjørnson felt frustrated that the writing of a man with whom he shared so many commonalties should so impede his own political objectives and literary ambitions.

The differing priorities on the issue of education for women emerge markedly in the context of the American tours undertaken by both men: Dickens visited twice in 1842 and 1867–68, Bjørnson in 1880–81. Both were attracted by the democratic constitution and egalitarian principles of the New World government, and both men were impressed with the state institutions they visited in Massachusetts: it is in their respective comments about schools and factories that their contrasting attitudes to the status of women start to emerge. When, in *American Notes*, Dickens applauds the access that the female workers at the well-run mills at Lowell have to a piano, to a circulating library, and to their own periodical (78), he seems not to see the need for such aspiring women to be given educational opportunities. Bjørnson, on the other hand, writes a passionate letter to *Dagbladet* on 30 December 1880, describing Wellesley College, where 'all the professors are women' and where female students are taught chemistry, physics, botany, geology, astronomy, and music and pay only 'about two hundred and fifty dollars a year for instruction, room, board, and all that goes with it' (Haugen 110). Wellesley College was founded in 1870, the year of Dickens's death, so it is not possible to make a direct comparison with Dickens's female schoolrooms. However, in my discussion of the school for girls in Bjørnson's novel, *Flags Are Flying in Town and Harbour* (1884), modelled on Wellesley College, I suggest that Bjørnson is demonstrating how progressive Norwegian education could be, given appropriate political and economic investment, and showing that it is a far cry from the institutions of the Misses Crumpton in *Boz* to that of Miss Twinkleton in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870).

Bjørnson and the depiction of the frightened child

It should come as no surprise, then, that Bjørnson's first appropriation of a Dickensian device is extracted from a school scene: Paul Dombey's arrival at Dr Blimber's Academy. In his novel *The Fisher Maiden* (1868), Bjørnson invokes *Dombey and Son* (1848) to highlight the static nature of English patriarchy in comparison with Norway's openness to feminist social mobility. Bjørnson focuses on the moment when Paul's misery is expressed through the repetition of Dr Blimber's words in the pulsating beats of the clock:

> 'And how do you do, Sir?' [Dr Blimber] said to Mr Dombey; 'and how is my little friend?'
>
> Grave as an organ was the Doctor's speech; and when he ceased, the great clock in the hall seemed (to Paul at least) to take him up, and to go on saying, 'how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?' over and over and over again. (142)

Bjørnson employs this device to convey the anxieties of a similarly aged girl called Petra, who is the eponymous 'fisher maiden'. She is the impetuous and naïve daughter of a tough woman called Fish-Gunlaug who runs an inn for seamen. Without intending to deceive anyone, Petra becomes engaged to three different men, and, when this state of affairs becomes known, brawling breaks out across the town. The mob surrounds her mother's inn, smashing its windows and singing a lampoon against Petra. Gunlaug arranges for Pedro, the local recluse (a sad, timid man towards whom she had once felt great affection but who had lacked the courage to marry her) to help Petra escape by boat to Bergen. While waiting to leave, Petra feels sick with anxiety and becomes aware of 'an old-fashioned clock … ticking out the seconds' (130).[6] Bjørnson's use of the word 'old-fashioned' here is very resonant, it being the adjective that Dickens repeatedly applies to Paul Dombey. Suddenly, by way of explanation for her choice of the strange Pedro to help them, the mother says 'I used to know that man once' (130). The sentence:

> kept whistling in [Petra's] ears. The clock took it up, and began to tick out, 'I – used – to – know – that – man – once'. Whenever, in her subsequent life, Petra encountered close, faint air, that room straightway stood before her with the memories of her sickness and the clock's 'I – used – to – know – that – man – once'. Whenever she went on a steamer … [the smells] always made her feel sea-sick at once, and constantly through her sickness that room stood day and night before her eyes, and in her ears was the sound of the clock ticking out its 'I – used – to – know – that – man – once.' (131)

The sentence encapsulates past, present, and future. Gunlaug is thinking about the past, about Pedro's failure to live up to her expectations of him. Petra, aware

of the ticking clock, thinks of the present, and her sick feelings at the tumult that her thoughtlessness has precipitated. The narrative looks to the future, and how Petra's seasickness would henceforth always trigger the memory of this moment. By setting this scene on the steamer, Bjørnson seems also to invoke the imagery of the river and the sea which runs through *Dombey and Son*, suggesting the mutability of life and the relentlessness of time passing. Paul is preoccupied by fancies of flowing water, and 'felt forced, sometimes, to try to stop it – to stem it with his childish hands – or choke its way with sand' (216–17). Paul is attempting to arrest the passage of time, to hold onto the present; he tries to defeat the past which associated his birth with his mother's death, casting her 'out upon the dark and unknown sea that rolls all round the world' (12) and to resist the future, for he senses that the sea 'is bearing me away, I think!' (217). Through marine imagery and its temporal symbolism, both writers convey the turbulent minds of children who cannot orient themselves in a confusing world.

The different genders of the protagonists reflect the priorities of their authors. In *Dombey*, mid-Victorian English society is founded on masculinity, money, and the railway, all things hard, cold, and correct, while *The Fisher Maiden* embraces passion, love, and literature, many things muddled and mistaken but sincere. Despite their different cultures, Petra and Paul are similar in their resistance to adulthood. When Blimber asks, 'Shall we make a man of him?' Paul replies, 'I had rather be a child' (142–3) and, likewise, when Petra is obliged to move into her own attic room on Confirmation Day 'it seemed to her that to be grown up was the most wretched thing to happen' (55). Whereas Little Paul succumbs to the weight of paternal expectation and dies, Petra is set loose to find her own way, and to grow into her vocation as an actress. The book ends with Petra's still stern but now proud mother in the audience of the theatre where Petra will soon perform. Mother and daughter have – without marrying – achieved independence, fulfilment, and success on their own terms.

The deaf-mute character in the works of Dickens and Bjørnson

The struggle for a working-class woman to gain a living was challenging in 19th-century Britain and Norway, but particularly when their efforts were exacerbated by disability. The fact that both Dickens and Bjørnson employ a deaf-mute character in their work is noteworthy because it is such an unusual theme for a writer of this period. As Jennifer Esmail points out, 'a deaf character's relationship to language … disqualifies him or her from conventional representation in Victorian fiction' (992). Although the depiction of communication between a deaf-mute character and a hearing person poses authorial challenges both on page and on stage, Dickens and Bjørnson both achieve it, though with very different emphases and outcomes. Dickens's 1865 Christmas story 'Dr Marigold' relates the childhood and early adulthood of a deaf-mute

character named Sophy,[7] and Bjørnson's political play *The King* (1877) features the 15-year-old deaf-mute servant Anna. Dickens's mode is to have Marigold, an itinerant hawker or 'Cheap Jack', describe his interactions with Sophy, which are achieved through an ad hoc form of signing which after several years renders her receptive to formal instruction at the London Deaf and Dumb Asylum. Similarly, Bjørnson's stage directions are explicit about manual signing: Anna 'talks to Gran [her master] on her fingers and receives orders from him in the same manner' (206). What is remarkable is not simply that both young women sign manually but that both writers emphasise this mode at a time when oralism, the anti-signing movement that forced deaf people to lip-read and speak, prevailed.[8] Esmail notes that Dickens was 'reportedly' a governor of the London Asylum (998), and the emphasis on signing in 'Dr Marigold' suggests his opposition to oralism, a stance which Bjørnson also adopts.

Dickens's deaf-mute character has triggered variant readings among critics. In the story, the infant Sophy is rendered 'unkempt and uncommunicative' by her abusive stepfather, until rescued by the eponymous Marigold, who names her after his own dead child. At 16, Sophy enters the Asylum, and emerges after two years 'such a woman, so pretty, so intelligent, so expressive' (10). At the school, Sophy falls in love with a deaf youth whom she subsequently marries and accompanies to China, where he works as a clerk (the representation of marriage between two deaf characters is also unusual in Victorian fiction). The climax of the story pivots on whether or not their child will be deaf, and the reader shares Marigold's suspense as five years pass without news from China. Then, Sophy's family returns to England, and on Christmas Day the child greets Marigold with 'a pretty voice', exclaiming 'Grandfather!' (47). Not only is the child not deaf but she is bilingual, conversing both by speech and by signing. In *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (2004), Martha Stoddard Holmes argues that Dickens's plot is ultimately conservative in its ableist emphasis on the priority of speech and hearing. By celebrating the child's escape from deafness, argues Holmes, the story represents 'a good example of narrative fiction palliating the concerns about hereditary 'defect' raised by Victorian medical science' (88). Holmes's argument is strengthened by the final image of Marigold weeping 'happy and yet *pitying* tears' ('Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions' 47, my emphasis); Dickens's use of 'pity' here is problematic since it conveys such condescending assumptions about disability. Carolyn Ferguson reads the word 'pity' in terms of Marigold's own recovery from past grief at the loss of his biological child, the first 'Sophy' (20), but this serves only to highlight the ambiguity of the ending. Certainly the notion of 'pity' treats deafness as a condition of loss, lack, suffering, and sorrow, an attitude that undermines Dickens's apparent support for the practice of marriage and parenthood by deaf people.

Bjørnson seems to share Dickens's interest in deafness but utilises his deaf-mute character, Anna, quite differently.[9] In *The King*, Anna is thrust into the maelstrom of Norwegian politics,[10] and comes to represent the colonised subject,

denied both a voice and a future. As the devoted servant of Harald Gran, the Minister of the Interior, Anna finds herself at the heart of the conflict between monarchists and republicans in Norway. Gran is an old friend of the king but also committed to a republican future for Norway and his dual allegiance finally results in his being killed for 'treason' by a former republican friend. Although the king sympathises with the republicans, and wishes to abolish the monarchy and live as a private citizen, he is prevented from doing so by the vested interests of the military, the church, and business, for whom the king 'is the padlock on [the] cashbox' (224). During the course of the play, the king is gradually deprived of all those who are close to him, until he is left in the cynical company of the General, the Priest, and the Mayor. Into that gathering comes Anna, sorrowing bitterly at the death of her master, Gran. The obsequious insincerities of the three representatives of the ruling powers contrast with Anna's candour. Bjørnson's stage directions have Anna entering the room: she 'throws herself at the King's feet, embracing his knees in despairing sorrow', and the king says 'Ah, here comes a breath of truth!' (279). Resolving to commit suicide, the king wants only Anna with him: 'You are the very picture of dumb loyalty. … I do not deserve to have such as you to watch by my side' (280). When a loud pistol shot is heard, 'noise and confusion grows louder every minute' but Anna stumbles onto the stage, 'her hands stretched out before her, as if she did not know where she was going' (291), not only symbolising muteness but also suggesting the blindness that threatened to dominate Norway's political future. In contrast to Dickens's tendency towards normativisation, bringing Sophy out of the margins and having her join society as a contented wife and the mother of a hearing child, Bjørnson's Anna is set on a downward trajectory, rendered doubly mute once she is deprived of her master, Gran, with whom she could communicate by signing, and directionless without his protection. She is Bjørnson's symbol of the Norwegian soul in the 1880s, deprived of voice and vision by the colonising powers.

The danger of laughter in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836)

On two occasions, Bjørnson makes an overt reference to a novel by Dickens as if signalling to his reader its intertextual relationship with his own narrative. *Magnhild* (1877) is a case in point:[11] in an isolated village, hidden amid 'high bold mountains' (9), the family of the Lutheran parish priest settles down to a reading of *The Pickwick Papers*. The Dickensian title subtly imports its own linguistic, figurative, and structural conventions into Bjørnson's fictional world, and the outcome represents an incongruous mix of discourses. Malcolm Andrews comments that *Pickwick* had 'acted as a mighty transfusion of humour into English literary culture, with its anaemic devotion to sensibility and its growing Evangelical puritanism' (7), and Bjørnson replicates that dynamic by transfusing the farcical and playful world of Pickwick into the stiff and sombre

sphere of Norwegian Lutheranism. Magnhild at the time of this reading is an eight-year-old orphan, her 14 relatives having recently perished in a landslide. The local priest took Magnhild to live with his family 'for the present, in order to set a good example', but Magnhild cannot regard this as a permanent home because, as the priest's wife reminds her, 'she was a poor girl who had neither relatives nor future of her own' (18, 45).[12] Into this somewhat begrudging atmosphere, *Pickwick* brings unwonted merriment. Bjørnson is, however, inviting the reader to consider the role of humour, for, although Wesley Brown reads this scene as a reflection of 'the mirth caused in Bjørnson's own home by similar readings of *Pickwick Papers*' (72),[13] it is actually that very 'mirth' that triggers the tragedy that consumes the novel's eponymous heroine.

Bjørnson seems to be intent on outdoing Dickens in his creation of the character who interrupts the evening reading. This unexpected visitor is Skarlie, the saddler: 'The kitchen door slowly opened and a large bald head, with a snub nose and smiling countenance, was thrust in' (25). Dickens frequently applies equivalents of the noun phrase 'smiling countenance' to Pickwick, varying from 'beaming countenance', 'amiable countenance', 'very pleased countenance', and 'benevolent countenance' (848, 113, 115, 476, and 203). Bjørnson seems to underline the physical connection between Pickwick and Skarlie by employing the phrase twice in relation to the latter. This cannot be dismissed simply as a translator's preference, for in the Norwegian text Skarlie is first described as having a 'smilende miner' and, eight lines later, a 'smilende ansigt' (*Samlede Digter-Verker*, 4:146). Skarlie's body is then revealed, inch by inch: 'A short leg in very wide trousers was next introduced, and this was followed by a crooked and consequently still shorter one' (25). At this point, Bjørnson seems also to invoke the comic 'flying waiter' of *Drood*, whose leg was 'always preceding himself and tray (with something of an angling air about it), by some seconds' (96), but Bjørnson challenges our inclination to laugh as the extent of Skarlie's disability is revealed:

> The whole figure stooped as it turned on the crooked leg to shut the door. The intruder thus presented to the party the back of the beforementioned large head, with its narrow rim of hair, a pair of square-built shoulders, and an extraordinarily large seat, only half-covered by a pea-jacket. Again he turned in a slanting posture toward the assembled party, and once more presented his smiling countenance with its snub nose. (25)

The mechanical nature of '*its*' turning movement and '*its* narrow rim of hair' transforms Skarlie into an automaton, imitating Dickens's trait of sometimes representing human movement in terms of 'simple mechanism, always in one way, (instead of moving with the infinite fluctuations of organisms, incalculable yet intelligible)' (Lewes 146).[14] Bjørnson echoes Dickens's notion of the permeability of the boundary between the human and the machine.

A significant source of the comic lies in the recognition of one's own superiority over what appears incongruous or subhuman. On Skarlie's arrival, Magnhild and the priest's two daughters 'bowed low over their work [and] a suppressed titter arose first from one piece of sewing and then from another' (25). The girls' reaction recalls that of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), who felt 'much inclined to laugh at [Quilp's] uncouth appearance and grotesque attitude' (51). The parallel between Skarlie and Quilp is further reinforced by the fact that each one 'thrusts' his head into view, forcibly imposing himself on the company (*Magnhild* 25; *OCS* 253). Skarlie's oddness is further emphasised when he takes over the reading of *Pickwick*, using 'such an unfamiliar pronunciation of the names of the personages and localities introduced that the humour of the text became irresistible' (26). Skarlie's identification with the Dickensian world is reiterated by his ventriloquising of it. His rendering of Pickwick instigates 'laughter which no one now attempted to restrain', and when the girls went to bed they imitated the saddler's mode of walking and talking: 'Magnhild was the most adroit in mimicking; she had observed him the most closely' (26–7).[15] Magnhild, so diminished in the priest's household, at last feels superior to another person.

In *Magnhild*, Bjørnson draws attention to the act of laughter by over-using the word, particularly in connection with Skarlie. 'Laughter', in its noun and verb forms, appears in *Pickwick Papers* 147 times, that is, more than in any other novel by Dickens; it is emitted in 'fits' and in 'peals' or 'bursting out', sometimes in 'a roar' (423, 476, 776, 342). Skarlie's contact with the girls involves a 'frequent intermingling of jests' and 'they gradually ceased laughing at him and laughed instead at the witty things he said' (27). In Skarlie's absence, the word disappears from the pages, until a year later when he returns, and the three girls carry in his luggage 'notwithstanding his *laughing* resistance, [and] their *laughter* accompanied him as he stood in the passage taking off his furs' (33, emphasis mine). Their group laughter is now an affirming activity. As suggested above, laughter can be a complex reaction that is often related to perceptions of power. Initially, the girls' laughter had marked Skarlie as Other, but he has gradually deflected this in order to become one of the group, laughing at the external Other. The target for Skarlie's ridicule is now Magnhild's adoptive family: 'Magnhild had never viewed her surroundings with critical eyes; she would now laugh heartily with Skarlie over the priest's last sermon … it was all described so comically' (34). Magnhild does not realise that Skarlie is slowly detaching her from her last precarious anchor: the somewhat neglectful surrogate family. By Skarlie's laughter, the innocent Magnhild is beguiled. The origin of Magnhild's plight was *Pickwick Papers*: it had predisposed her to laughter, and Skarlie exploited that chink of openness until she was ensnared. Believing herself to be an encumbrance on the priest and, having no alternative, Magnhild tearfully agrees to marry the elderly saddler.

Bjørnson problematises the marriage between Magnhild and Skarlie. It cannot be viewed as a union of good and evil, of innocent and perverted, such

as that projected by Quilp's lusting after Little Nell, by Arthur Gride's designs on Madeline Bray, or by Uriah Heep's pursuit of Agnes Whitfield. Bjørnson's Skarlie is not one-dimensional like Dickens's grotesques: he is not demonic like Quilp (indeed, Skarlie became disfigured by rescuing a child from a burning house), not miserly like Gride (Skarlie showers gifts on Magnhild), nor obsequious like Heep (Skarlie is a successful and confident trader). Despite this, Magnhild is physically repelled by the old man: 'she could not stir, could not grasp a single thought except that she was in the clutches of a great lobster' (48). Over the course of several years, they become estranged: Magnhild develops a hopeless love for a consumptive composer, while Skarlie engages in an affair with a drunken and degraded local woman. Finally, Magnhild leaves Skarlie and plans a visit to America 'in order to see and to learn', hoping to 'return [someday] and teach others' (211). Bjørnson here identifies with his protagonist, for he too, as he wrote to Rasmus B. Anderson, would go to America 'in order to learn' (Haugen 141). Magnhild's future is vague: she will venture west, a woman separated from her husband, resolving to learn a skill by which she can ultimately contribute to Norwegian society. Despite Magnhild's new-found independence, the ending is dark. The combination of laughter and Lutheran duty has generated only misery; in the wrong environment, Bjørnson seems to suggest, Pickwickian humour may be destructive.

Bjørnson and the tearing up of *David Copperfield* (1850)

Bjørnson's critique of Dickens's representation of women becomes more pronounced in *Flags Are Flying in Town and Harbour* (1884), a work more commonly known in Britain as *The Heritage of the Kurts*, following its publication in English in 1892. This novel marks the second occasion when Bjørnson had imported a Dickensian text, that of *David Copperfield*, into his Norwegian fiction. In 1900, when the journal *Norske Intelligenssedler* sought to advertise a Norwegian edition of *David Copperfield*, its editor elicited comments about the book from leading writers and public figures. When Bjørnson was approached, he was 'not unusually, in a rush', says Tore Rem, and so he referred the journal's readers to *Heritage*, indicating that he had written about *Copperfield* there (414). Rem explains: 'In that novel a young mother struggles to read foreign books, but is completely taken in by her birthday present, *Copperfield*, which was then England's favourite novel' (414). In order to convey the idea that Bjørnson depicts *David Copperfield* as a fascinating read, Rem misrepresents the scene with the young mother. A closer look at this novel and the context of this scene shows that Bjørnson's intention was rather different from Rem's interpretation. In his critique of *Copperfield*, Bjørnson strikes at the heart of Dickens's *oeuvre*, not only because of its autobiographical aspects but also because Dickens had declared this work to be 'a favourite child' (Preface to the 1867 edition, xvii).

In *Heritage*, Bjørnson challenges Dickens with the scientific and philosophical thinking that became current after *Copperfield*. H.H. Boyesen notes that, between 1867 and 1872, Bjørnson experienced 'a period of barrenness, as far as external productivity went, but in reality [it was] a period of intellectual absorption and incubation' during which he read Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, J.S. Mill, Max Müller, and Hippolyte Taine (1), and he draws upon some of these ideas in *Heritage*. The novel traces the growth from birth to manhood of Tomas Rendalen, who is the last of five generations of the Kurt family. Over a period of 200 years, each Kurt son has inherited his father's vicious predisposition to violence, infidelity, drunkenness, and insanity, and the local town is peopled with the illegitimate offspring of this notorious lineage. The story pauses in the mid-19th century, when Tomas's father, having just beaten his mother, suddenly dies of apoplexy, some months before Tomas is born. His mother, Tomasina, is so desperate to terminate the Kurt dynasty that on first discovering her pregnancy she considers suicide, but instead resolves to extinguish the bloodline by educating her son in the ways of moral and social conduct. Tomas is a difficult baby, and causes his mother much distress. Having exhausted her supply of child-rearing manuals, Tomasina escapes into *David Copperfield*, and her copy of that book becomes the object of the 'last great struggle' between mother and son (69). The day is Tomas's second birthday (not Tomasina's birthday, as Rem avers) and he resents his mother's absorption in Dickens's novel. Far from 'struggling to read foreign books', as Rem claims, Tomasina, the daughter of a headmaster, had spent time before her marriage working in England, France, and Germany, acquiring fluency in all three languages and becoming an 'unusually clever teacher' (38). Indeed, she is so imaginative and receptive a reader that 'all the life-like forms gathered themselves round little Tomas … and she dreamt of little Em'ly and little Tomas' (67). For Tomasina, this fictional world segues seamlessly into her own. Tomas, frustrated by his mother's preoccupation, takes his revenge when she is absent from the room by tearing up the volume: 'After the first one or two [pages], he took them out several at a time, twenty in all before his mother returned' (68). By this act, Bjørnson seems to say that he too will do violence to *David Copperfield*, and that he will disturb the unreflective absorption of readers in Dickens's romanticised story and draw their attention to more demanding questions.

After this dramatic scene, it becomes clear that *Copperfield* is a pervasive presence in *Heritage*, and that parallels exist between the characters and issues of both books. The figure of Tomasina resonates with David's surrogate mother, Betsey Trotwood: both marry abusive husbands, and these two eccentric, bespectacled women devote their lives to mitigating the consequences of such humiliation. Just as Aunt Betsey dilutes the male genealogy by renaming David as 'Trot', so Tomasina gives her son the surname 'Rendalen' in order to banish the patronym of Kurt. Tomasina is entrusted with far greater responsibility and professional opportunity than her English counterpart. As part of her mission to 'obliterat[e] the evil example with a good one', she transforms the Kurt

estate, which for generations had harboured men of violence and insanity, into a school for girls where 'the whole course of education [had] morality as its aim' (92, 70). Like David Copperfield, Tomas was born after his father's death, and saddled with an equally burdensome biological inheritance. In both cases, the drama lies in the protagonists' emotional development, the struggle between nature and nurture. David seems destined to repeat the negative behaviour pattern of his parents: his mother, Clara, is irrepressibly girlish, playing on her own immaturity, and David's childlike adoration of Clara later translates into his infatuation with Dora Spenlow, who is as inept and frivolous as Clara had been. David duplicates his father's gullibility in marrying 'a wax-doll', fulfilling Betsey Trotwood's prediction that 'he would be as like his father as it's possible to be, if he was not so like his mother too' (203). David is, however, saved from the consequences of his inherited flaws. Dora dies young, leaving David free to marry Agnes Wickfield, and with her help to become a successful novelist: 'What I am, you have made me, Agnes' (848). He writes the final words of his autobiography with Agnes seated beside him. Dickens's propensity to end his novels with happy marriages is described by Catherine Belsey in *Critical Practice* (1980) as the final 'reinstatement of order', suggesting that 'a harmonious and coherent world' will always restore itself (240).

No such happy ending is available to Tomas, who must forever 'struggle to free himself from the Kurt inheritance', and, as evident in his impetuous destruction of his mother's book, Tomas is bequeathed an 'unruly nature' and an 'uneven temper' (186, 202). As an adult, Tomas travels and studies, and, having read Prosper Lucas's *Traité Philosophique de L'Hérédité Naturelle* (1847) and Herbert Spencer's *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (1861), he develops a Lamarckian philosophy. He believes that an individual can either degenerate into inherited patterns of immoral or self-destructive behaviour, like the illegitimate offspring of the 'many mad Kurts' who lived in the town, or like Tomas himself can try to fashion his own character by force of will and education. Having presented these theories, Bjørnson then leaves Tomas's fate hanging in the balance. Five years later, when Bjørnson's was writing *In God's Way* (1889), he brought Tomas Rendalen into that text as a minor character. Tomas confesses to a friend: 'I am not at liberty to love anyone. … There is madness in our family … you know how ungovernable I am … my father was exactly the same' (111). It is as though, during the passing of five years of real time between the novels, Bjørnson imagines Tomas having lost his way and descended into depression and frenzy. Bjørnson is reminding his readers that there are no fairy-tale solutions to the problem of biological inheritance. Tomas's act of tearing up *Copperfield* as an infant and his chaotic despair in *In God's Way* evince his rage at being forced to relinquish an optimistic Dickens-style future, to be denied a life as a 'family man' like David. Just as in *The King* Anna's hopelessness showed up by contrast Dickens's contrived normalisation of disability in 'Dr Marigold', so, through Tomas, Bjørnson challenges Dickens's side-stepping of the complex issues related to

genetic inheritance in his desire to restore 'a harmonious and coherent world' (Belsey 240).

Bjørnson believes that women should be equipped to make more informed decisions about marriage, and that fiction should not seduce readers into notions of fairy-tale romance. Education was for Bjørnson fundamental to female development, and the school run by Tomasina and her adult son is clearly based on Wellesley College in Boston; it trains its pupils in natural science, theology, gymnastics, and debating, as well as 'history and general literature as branches of knowledge which have an influence in the formation of character' but, most importantly, using Herbert Spencer's axiom, it teaches 'the knowledge how to regulate one's own life' (113). Women, Bjørnson argues in *Heritage*, need to understand the nature and the power of their own sexuality. In a lecture to the parents, Tomas explains that most adolescent girls undergo:

> a period of change [when they] deteriorate and lose their openness, and much of, or all, their industry and sense of order … therefore our work must be … completely prepared to meet this physical change. … For it is no use denying that this exists, or shutting one's eyes to it. (111)

Bjørnson is challenging the sort of education that Dora Spenlow receives. She can only envisage love as something innocent and childlike; Jenni Calder thinks that Dora 'is afraid of sex just as she is afraid of adult responsibility' (101). That Victorian men in general both expected women to be dollish, and then blamed them for being so, is suggested by some of the comments about Dora in the reviews during *Copperfield*'s serialisation. In July 1850, the reviewer of *Bell's Life in London* asserted that David 'deserves contempt for loving such a thread-paper piece of affectation' (3). The application of so domestic an analogy as a 'thread-paper' (this was a strip of thin soft paper folded into creases so as to form separate divisions for different skeins of thread, and so, when used attributively, means someone feeble and flimsy) is unkindly pertinent given Dora's sad incompetence in housekeeping. One month later, in the *Weekly Dispatch*, the reviewer observes that:

> there is something touching in the childish simplicity of poor Dora; but how many Doras are there in the world who, for lack of a gentle firmness on the part of a husband, convert unconsciously the happiness of the home into a desolation such as now menaces the home of our hero. (502)

Judging by such reviews, Dickens does little in *Copperfield* to enlighten Victorian men about the double-bind for women who, having been trained to be decorative 'dolls', were suddenly expected on marriage to transform themselves into efficient housekeepers.

In *Heritage*, Bjørnson foregrounds the issue of dollishness by featuring actual dolls in the text. When four of the Senior Girls come unexpectedly upon a doll's house, their behaviour is transformed. They are enraptured by its miniaturised domesticity, the 'complete and marvellously dainty kitchen' and 'the sweetest little beds' (159). Then a shift takes place when the dolls are removed from their household trappings: they now become figurines to be glamorised and bedecked for a dolls' court ball. Utterly absorbed, 'eight eyes and forty fingers rummaged' among brocade, silk, and velvet, and 'endless chatter filled the air with fancies' (166). These dolls were not 'baby dolls' but miniature adult dolls, of the type owned by wealthy Victorian women, who would purchase clothing for them from such workers as Jenny Wren, the dolls' dressmaker in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). When Jenny Wren describes her work with Charlie Hexham and Bradley Headstone, her references to the 'Fine Ladies' and the dolls become interchangeable: she says, 'I had a doll married, last week, and was obliged to work all night,' to which Headstone replies, 'I am sorry your fine ladies are so inconsiderate' (223). Similarly, Bjørnson's Senior Girls identify with the dolls: they turn away from 'playing house' to replicate the socially directed appearance of debutantes at a formal ball, the place where the female adorns herself in order to become 'a lady', an object of desire. This interaction with the dolls represents the girls' shift from domestic to sexual engrossment, and illustrates Tomas's prediction of the adolescent female's 'physical change'.

The girls' daydreams, projected onto the dolls, are safe so long as they are protected from male intrusion. Suddenly, the girls' fantasies are disturbed by an announcement that Consul Engel has unexpectedly arrived, and 'amid smothered cries' the dolls are hastily packed away (170). When he enters the room, the girls are embarrassed because:

> the lower part of a doll became visible! It lay there, 'naked and face downwards' as the song says.[16] Tora tried to cover it up, but the Consul had caught sight of it, and with a 'Pardon me, Froken' he stooped and picked it up … asking 'What in the world is this?' (170)

When he queried why they had tried to hide 'such a harmless thing' they answered, 'Because the doll was undressed, of course' (171). His banter, directed mainly at the beautiful Tora, causes her to become increasingly identified with the half-naked doll, feeling vulnerable, 'as though she had no dress on at all' (171). A notorious womaniser, Consul Engel represents the intrusion of predatory masculinity into the room, charging the atmosphere with disturbing male sexuality, consuming Tora with 'a feeling of helplessness' so that she departs in tears (172).

Again, there is an echo here of *Our Mutual Friend*, in terms of the relationship between the doll and exploitative sex. While Headstone struggles to understand Jenny's riddles, Eugene Wrayburn is acutely attuned to Jenny's

conceit of mixing the fine ladies and the dolls, hinting to her his plan to make the socially inferior Lizzie Hexham his mistress, when he says, 'I'm thinking of setting up a doll, Miss Jenny' (237). As Pam Morris points out, this phrase has only one meaning, that of 'prostitutes dressed in the trashy finery of cheap consumer taste, like one of Jenny Wren's "flaunting dolls"' (137). However, Wrayburn soon realises that he desires Lizzie not as a mistress but as a wife, and it is Lizzie who evades him, being aware of the class gulf between them. Dickens, however, effects a social fairy tale, and *Our Mutual Friend* ends with their happy marriage.

Like Lizzie Hexham, poverty renders the Norwegian Tora vulnerable to male predators. Unlike the other three Senior Girls who had dressed the dolls, Tora comes from a poor family. She is the eldest of 10 children, the daughter of the chief customhouse officer, 'who drank' (149). Having lived abroad with her shipbroker uncle for some years, she is now middle class by education and aspiration. Following her uncle's death, Tora has had to return home, but gladly escapes 'the hurry-skurry and disorder' of family life by attending Tomas's school (216). During the school holidays, however, she is alone, with no friends in whom she can confide her confused feelings, recently aroused by the attentions of Lieutenant Niels Fürst, a naval officer. Fürst is a man whose 'eyes both laughed and stabbed' (214). We already know from *Magnhild* that laughter in Bjørnson's work may be ominous, and here its coupling with the penetrative effect of stabbing makes Fürst dangerous. Tora's mother, like many Dickensian mothers, is too preoccupied with her own concerns to provide adequate protection for her daughter, and Tora 'never once thought of' Mrs Holm as a source of refuge (227). Although Tora's training at the school has warned her against being 'an easy prey for a rogue', her sense of sexuality is overwhelming, and 'the danger had something attractive in it' (230). Daily, Tora goes for long walks in the woods, invariably passing Fürst's house; she eludes his early attempts to find her, but increasingly 'the image of the sly, excited, accursed face … seemed to stab her – to thrill through her' (230). Finally, when Fürst finds her alone in the wood, she cannot control her emotions:

> She looked down below her … she wanted to get up and go away; but her eyes continued fixed on the branches below, there was something dark beneath them. A head pushed its way through, a man – he! … He looked up. With all her power she raised herself, though her feet felt as heavy as lead; but she did not turn from him, or attempt to go away, and by degrees she lost the desire to do so. Now there was only the stone between them, a wave of terror swept over her and roused her; she turned her head now, staggered a few steps – and met him. She leaned forward, he took her hand, his arm slipped under hers – she felt as though a burning band were round her. She fell so unexpectedly and so heavily that he nearly fell with her. (232)

Tora finally gives up the struggle between her recognition of Fürst's predatory nature and her susceptibility to his erotic power over her. Needless to say, Bjørnson does not end *Heritage* with a happy Lizzie/Eugene-style wedding.

Bjørnson prepared us for a female 'fall' many chapters earlier, when Tomasina was so engrossed in Dickens's novel that she 'dreamt of little Em'ly and little Tomas' (67). Dickens excuses Little Em'ly's 'fall' by her dream of becoming 'a lady' and her belief in Steerforth's promises: the sexual act is not described, she is saved before she slips into prostitution, and her transgression is erased by her emigration to Australia. Bjørnson by contrast accounts for Tora's act as a combination of the excitement of being desired and the novelty of sexual emotions, that 'period of change' predicted by Tomas. While Little Em'ly's life 'can be summed up as a string of past participles: seduced, rescued, redeemed, removed' (Ingham 55), Tora actively confronts her seducer and faces the future with her illegitimate baby.

. . .

Despite the many correspondences between the lives and career experiences of Dickens and Bjørnson, the most productive aspect of their literary relationship is forged by Bjørnson's frustration with Dickens's circumscription of female competency, and his low expectations of woman's potential contribution beyond the domestic sphere. For Bjørnson, Dickens's women are – like all Norwegian citizens – colonised by a subjugating power. The solution to this colonised state of mind was education, not only in terms of an improved and modernised curriculum, such as he witnessed in America, but also in the acquisition of knowledge about 'regulating one's own life' and developing 'self-awareness leading to self-respect' (*Heritage* 113). By giving his heroines the same dilemmas as those besetting Dickens's women – poverty, isolation, and disability – but equipping them with the means and the resolve to overcome such problems, Bjørnson hoped that readers of both genders would share his vision of, and responsibility for, the building of a progressive and prosperous Norway. Whereas Dickens's women are generally denied both agency and knowledge, their counterparts in Bjørnson's writings learn, develop, and change during the course of their trials. Rather than resolving women's stories with marriage (Sophy), with death (Dora), or with emigration (Little Em'ly), as is Dickens's custom, Bjørnson sets his women challenges to overcome: young Petra must identify and fulfil her vocation as an actress; Anna must find a way out of civic disorder; Magnhild must go to America to learn; Tomasina must educate her son out of Kurt violence; and Tora must nurture her illegitimate child. In this regard, Bjørnson seems to anticipate some of the neo-Victorian rewritings of Dickensian women, as discussed in relation to Miss Havisham and Rosa Bud in Chapters 4 and 5 of this volume. Invariably independence is foisted upon Bjørnson's women but they are empowered by experience or education to face their demanding tasks and uncertain futures. Bjørnson's engagement with

Dickens's novels would have energised those Norwegian readers who recognised the intertextual resonances, not only because Bjørnson was advocating the superiority of Norwegian feminist ideology over the attitudes and conventions of the British, who at that time ruled the largest empire in history, but also because he was wrestling with Charles Dickens, the writer who in his lifetime was a global spokesman for his age.

Endnotes

[1] In addition to the Norwegian fascination with American life in general, Erling Sandmo notes that Dickens's reports from Cherry Hill Prison and his views on the 'Philadelphia system' were included in debates about prison management in Norway in January 1843 (Rem 411–12).

[2] For summaries of these plays, see the *Literary Encyclopaedia*: *The Editor*: https://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=35811. *The Bankrupt*: https://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=35814. *A Gauntlet*: https://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=35916.

[3] The final stanza of Bjørnson's National Anthem illustrates Norway as the motherland:

> And, as warrior sires have made her
> Wealth and fame increase
> At the call we too will aid her
> Armed to guard her peace.

[4] Within Dickens's stereotyping there are, of course, many calibrations and complexities. Mrs Nickleby (*Nicholas Nickleby*), who fails to protect her daughter from such predators as Sir Mulberry Hawk, and the unyielding and vindictive Mrs Clennam (*Little Dorrit*), who alienates her son by her religiosity, are dysfunctional mothers in very different ways. Dora Spenlow, David Copperfield's first wife, seems to be frightened of sex, while Agnes Wickfield, his second wife, seems too saintly to be associated with the act. Little Nell (*The Old Curiosity Shop*) and Esther Summerson (*Bleak House*) are treated as 'orphans' but in fact Nell's grandfather is still alive, as is Esther's natural mother, Lady Dedlock. Nancy is described in the 1841 preface to *Oliver Twist* as a 'prostitute,' but it is generally thought that Dickens was invoking the term to mean a woman living out of wedlock, and, although Little Em'ly (*David Copperfield*) elopes with Steerforth, her 'fall' is treated sympathetically (see discussion below). In *Bleak House*, Mrs Pardiggle harangues the lower classes and her own children with religion, while the philanthropist, Mrs Jellyby, is so obsessed with her African projects that she neglects her home and family.

[5] The tensions between young Bjørnson and his father, a stern Lutheran minister who dominated both the family and the parish, finds echoes in

the strained father–son relationships depicted in Bjørnson's peasant tales, *Synnøve Solbakken* (1857) and *Arne* (1858).

[6] As Rob Jacklosky comments in his analysis of *The Goldfinch* in Chapter 6 of this volume, Donna Tarrt identifies the ticking clock as a peculiarly Dickensian motif, one which transports the protagonist, Theo Decker, from the 21st century into the world of 1850.

[7] This story is the frame for 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', the title of the entire 1865 Christmas number of *All the Year Round*. In this format, the first part of Dr Marigold's story (3–10) stops when Sophy returns from the Asylum and reads the stories, some of which were written by contributors, characterised as 'prescriptions' with such titles as 'Not to be Taken at Bed-time' or 'To be Taken in Water'. The narrative of 'Dr Marigold' is resumed at the end, under the title 'To be Taken for Life' (45–7), after which Sophy, who has read 'the whole of the foregoing several times over', goes to China with her husband for five years and returns with her child to share Christmas Day with Dr Marigold.

[8] Oralism dominated educational policy in Europe and USA from around the 1860s to the 1960s. In 1880, the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf enshrined the 'incontestable superiority of speech over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society' (Scouten 203).

[9] It is very feasible that Bjørnson would have read 'Dr Marigold'; Tore Rem notes that, between 1859 and 1880, 180 articles from *All the Year Round* were published in the Norwegian press, while the journals themselves were also subscribed to by Norwegian readers and institutions (412).

[10] The Swedish king, Oscar II, who ruled Norway from 1872 until his dethronement in 1905, was very offended by *The King* and personally disliked Bjørnson: on hearing that Bjørnson was leaving for America, Oscar wrote to his prime minister saying 'I agree that there is no great advantage in B.B.'s journey to the New World, especially compared with what it would be if he went to the Other World' (Haugen 142).

[11] *Magnhild* is one of five of Bjørnson's works to be entitled after the female protagonist, the others being *Synnøve Solbakken* (1857), *Halte-Hunda* (1858), *Maria Stuart I Skotland* (1863), and *Leonarda* (1879). Dickens's only novel so entitled is *Little Dorrit* (1857), which combines the diminutive adjective that he often applies to his heroines (Little Nell, Little Em'ly) and the patrilineal surname.

[12] Like Dickens's orphans, especially Oliver Twist, Magnhild is denied any sense of physical or emotional security in her adoptive home. This theme is further developed by Katie Bell in relation to William Faulkner's character, Joe Christmas, in *Light in August* (1932): see Chapter 3 of this volume.

[13] Brown's assertion is based on an unpublished letter written by Bjørnson's niece, Signe, recalling her childhood visits to Bjørnson's home in Aulestad and mentioning the excitement experienced by the family whenever Dickens was read aloud in the evenings. Discussed on 'Barndomsminner

fra Aulestad', broadcast on Norsk Rikskringkasting by Guri Stormoen on 1 January 1966 (Brown 71–2).

[14] Just as Skarlie is portrayed as a hybrid human–machine through the use of 'it', so Pete Orford, in Chapter 5, points out Dickens's use of the possessive pronoun to suggest Rosa Bud's androgyny.

[15] The observation by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson that, in order to feel a sense of normalcy in their own bodies, mainstream figures are often drawn to look closely at grotesques, is also discussed in Chapter 3 of this volume.

[16] The National Library in Oslo, where there is an archive of Norwegian folk songs and ballads, was unable to identify either the phrase 'naken med baken opp' ('naked and face downwards') or the song to which it allegedly belongs. Either the song has been lost or Bjørnson is highlighting the erotic nature of the phrase by implying its source in a popular song.

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CHAPTER 3

Dickens and Faulkner: Saving Joe Christmas

Katie Bell

> [H]e didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing…
>
> (William Faulkner, *Light in August*)

In one of the closing chapters of William Faulkner's 1932 novel *Light in August*, the Reverend Hightower acts as narrator and describes to himself, and thus the reader, the reasons for his wanting to move to Jefferson, Mississippi, as a young man. Throughout the novel, it has seemed that the Reverend had long ago arbitrarily picked the town of Jefferson from a map as a place in which to begin his ministry. In this chapter, however, he explains that he has harboured something akin to an obsession with ministering to the same town where his grandfather, an officer in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, lived and fought. Hightower feels that, if he can minister in Jefferson, he will be able to witness, both to physically see and to spiritually envision, the ghosts of his Southern forefathers. He thinks, 'But soon, as soon as we can, where we can look out the window and see the street, maybe even the hoofmarks or their shapes in the air, because the same air will be there even if the dust, the mud, is gone—' (Faulkner 363). Hightower's narration of his drive describes succinctly how Charles Dickens can be seen and felt throughout succeeding literature of the

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American South in the post-Civil War decades. For example, ghosts shape the protagonists' decisions in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* in which Scrooge witnesses the apparition of Marley, who has procured for him a chance at redemption. By witnessing the ghost, which had 'sat invisible beside [Scrooge] many and many a day' without being seen, Scrooge is able to change his future and begin spiritually to 'walk abroad among his fellow-men' (*CC* 25, 23). Where Scrooge's visitations from apparitions act as a catalyst to move him to change his ways, Hightower's visions (to which the reader is never a witness) do not move him to such change. They instead act as an anchor, keeping him within the past; as Michael Millgate writes, Hightower is 'a non-participator, a man withdrawn from life and its sufferings' (*The Achievement* 130).

Like Hightower, many of Dickens's characters are 'living dead', stuck in withdrawn positions which are pre-epiphanic (by which I mean that they are paused in the moments before the inevitable realisation of epiphany). Faulkner and Dickens both focused on the pasts and presents of characters engaged in a spiritual war with themselves, as well as the world around them. For many of them, their decay and ruin is self-inflicted, a reaction to the heartbreaks of life. These well-known literary figures (more obvious examples include Miss Havisham and Magwitch of *Great Expectations* and, as mentioned earlier, Marley and Scrooge of *A Christmas Carol*) together form a prototype of 'living dead' characters that draws upon elements of the Gothic and grotesque traditions for its creations. As discussed in Chapter 4, neo-Victorian prequels have focused on exploring the unknown backstories of enigmatic characters like Miss Havisham. Miss Havisham's sufferings have been explored in these prequels, and these fictions have enabled the reader to witness Havisham's trauma, while we know full well what type of 'freak' she will later become. Michael Hollington asserts in *Dickens and the Grotesque* (1984) that Dickens has a complex relationship with the grotesque in his novels. This stems from various sources, but the end result is that Dickens's understanding of these grotesque traditions led to his creating literary representations of his community, representations that were easily categorised and understood by his readers. Miss Havisham serves as a more obvious example of how Dickens imbues his characters with elements of the grotesque, as she lives her life estranged from her community, hidden away in the dark corners of her rotting estate and actively seeking to be viewed as bizarre. Upon meeting Pip for the first time, Miss Havisham commands him to view her in all her grotesquery: 'Look at me. … You are not afraid of a woman who has never seen the sun since you were born?' (*GE* 67). Hollington asserts that, especially in *Great Expectations*, 'a complex of ironies unfolds [and ultimately] Society as a whole … is represented as an *exhibition* of freaks' (217 and 221, author's emphasis). Although Pip is in all ways a 'normal' child, he is surrounded by strange and peculiar characters from the outset: figures responsible for his upbringing. This proposed 'freak show' starts with Magwitch, the escaped convict who threatens Pip with death by cannibalism if he does not

comply with the criminal's demands. Then Pip's guardians, Joe and Mrs Joe, are introduced, and this couple exhibits two extremes of child-rearing. Mr Pumblechook is brought into the mix with his comic yet malevolent, never-ending, dogged questioning of Pip's mathematical knowledge. All of these humorously exaggerated figures in Pip's community are the opening act which introduces his visit to the crumbling, ghostly residence, Satis House.

The specific 'freaks' on which I will focus, those who experience a living death, are particularly compelling grotesque characters because they have chosen to remain psychologically fixed in the past, a type of living effigy of their own personal histories. When examined more closely, one can see that this is essentially the definition of a spectre in a ghost story. Ghost stories have long captivated public interest, as can be seen with the popularity of novels, films, and video games which capitalise on such subjects. The lure of this genre can be explained in one way by examining what these apparitions convey: their fascination lies in their ability to stay rooted within the past. Unlike the rest of us, they do not have to change and move into the unforeseeable future. Dickens himself, in one of his literary pieces in *All the Year Round* titled 'Nurse's Stories' (8 September 1860), states that he was compelled to listen to his childhood nurse tell him ghostly stories, by which he was both frightened and intrigued. Dickens was a writer of whom Faulkner was well aware, as his mother, Maud, had introduced a young Faulkner and his brothers to Dickens's works at home before they began attending school. When he eventually developed an 'indifference to education' and turned to informal self-education by reading, it was 'Shakespeare, Dickens, Balzac and Conrad' on whom he focused heavily (Minter 12).[1] These compelling Dickensian 'living dead' characters are recreated in Faulkner's texts and re-envisioned for the 20th century in the aftermath of the destructive and life-changing American Civil War.[2] Chapter 2 explores how, through the strong influences of Dickens's works, Nordic author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson utilised figures made popular by Dickens in order to explore issues facing Norway at the beginning of the 20th century. I contend that Faulkner does something akin to this and utilises Dickensian 'freaks' to create his own characters which populate a poverty-stricken American landscape with undercurrents of racism and misogyny.

Many of Faulkner's characters have difficulty with the well-known Southern adage 'never forget'. Gavin Stevens (a character who appears in multiple novels, including the end of *Light in August*) observes in *Requiem for a Nun*, 'The past is never dead. It's not even past' (Faulkner 92). Millgate postulates that this remark is perplexing because it consists of two parts, first, that the past is, 'in a sense, never dead' and is therefore 'always sufficiently alive to haunt the present' ('History' 11). Second, Millgate notes that the past is not 'even past' because the South constantly relives it, glorifying its reconstructed history and winning 'the irremediable battles' ('History' 8). Quentin Compson (who, like Stevens, also appears in multiple novels) demonstrates this struggle as he works to overcome

his Southern legacy and to truly know himself in the present, but ultimately he cannot. At the end of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin's college roommate Shreve (who, as Millgate points out, is 'a man unconcerned with his history' as he is from 'the newly settled prairies' of Alberta, Canada) asks the Southerner why he hates the South, to which Quentin replies, 'I dont [*sic*] hate it … *I dont. I dont!*' (Millgate 'History' 1, Faulkner 378, author's emphasis). Millgate also writes that Faulkner's novels work to demonstrate 'that it is one thing to recognise that the past is not dead … but that it is quite another thing to submit our lives to the control of that past, to insist … upon reminding ourselves and others to never forget' ('History' 13–14). These Faulknerian 'living dead' figures, of which Quentin is one example, serve as the personifications of an obsession with remembering, and ultimately their epiphanies serve as tools to demonstrate the dangers of a static life lived in the mind.

When considering these 'living dead' figures, it is apparent that *Light in August* and *Bleak House* have strong connections. Both novels are concerned with the line between good and evil, lost souls, hauntings, and the search for identity. Millgate recognises this connection in his study *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (1966), but focuses on Faulkner's style in the opening of the novel and its narration of Lena Grove: 'and even the abrupt transitions to apparently unrelated material in the second and third chapters will not disturb anyone familiar with Dickens—with, say, *Bleak House*, or *Our Mutual Friend*' (124). *Bleak House* is centrally focused on the plight of Esther Summerson, an orphan who has been designated to be the companion of a ward of the Chancery Court, Ada Clare. However, other motifs in the novel include hidden pasts and secret documents. An insidious undercurrent beneath these prevalent themes is the presence of a ghost, both as a legend and later as an actual character within the novel, and this ghost is what I examine here. In the second instalment of *Bleak House* (April 1852), the ending chapter is titled 'The Ghost's Walk'. Taking Dickens's already-established penchant for ghost stories, it becomes clear that in the early days of this novel's serialisation he was capitalising on the public's interest in tales of gothic suspense to hook a readership, and he therefore introduces one of the novel's main characters, Lady Dedlock, in a manner similar to the depiction of a Victorian spectre. The Lady has a past that is shrouded in mystery, which is made all the more eerie as she is introduced alongside her country estate, Chesney Wold, and its ghost of the walk, thus paralleling the two by association. Upon discovering that the great love of her youth had been living in London and working as a legal manuscript writer, she secretly leaves the country, travelling into the slums of London to discern more information about her lover's last days. She finds Jo, an illiterate crossing sweep who happened to know her dead lover Captain Hawdon by way of a shared state of poverty. The Lady disguises herself in her servant's clothing and covers her face so that she may not be recognised, but the outcome of this disguise is that she appears to be a phantom to Jo, whose ignorance makes him susceptible to

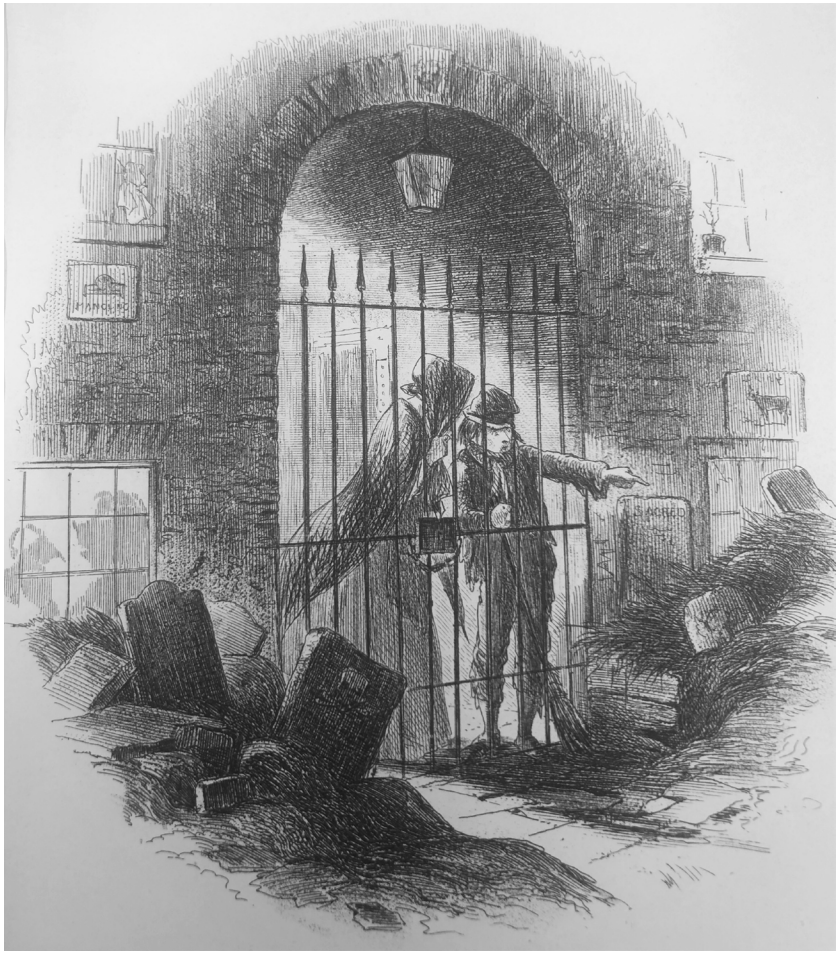

Figure 3.1: ***Consecrated Ground,*** etching by Hablot K. Browne (Phiz), 1853. Image copyright and related rights waived via CC0.

believing his fears and superstitions. 'Her face is veiled. … She never turns her head. … Then, she slightly beckons to [Jo], and says, "Come here!"' (*BH* 276).

Dickens draws on aspects of the Victorian spiritualist movement, as well as his earlier ghostly characters such the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come from *A Christmas Carol*, for his representations of Lady Dedlock.[3] In *Bleak House*, Dickens brings a phantom to life and creates a living and breathing ghost. Lady Dedlock is paralleled with her country house, Chesney Wold, which is 'wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds. … [Chesney Wold] is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air' (*BH* 55). The Dedlock estate is located in Lincolnshire, a place described as having 'a stagnant river, with melancholy trees for islands in it', and this does nothing to enliven the atmosphere of the 'extremely dreary' country house (*BH* 56). By association, Lady Dedlock becomes a part of the estate's 'mould … cold sweat [and] general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves' (56). Having met and married Sir Leicester (no one quite knows how, because, as the narrator states, 'she had not even family'), Lady Dedlock, then having 'conquered her world, fell … into the freezing mood' (57). This 'freezing mood' is an indicator of the Lady's choice to remain fixed, cold, and cut off from the world around her, much as the Dedlock estate is described; however, the Lady is not a spirit haunting this world because of unfinished business (a common plot motif in Victorian ghost stories). She is alive but has chosen to live her life as spiritually dead, and is therefore presented in the same way a spectre would be in order to convey this 'living dead' state to the readership.

Holly Furneaux discusses the literary relationship between the social deaths endured by women in the 19th century under coverture laws, and the prevalent fear which abounded in the mid-Victorian era of being subjected to an erroneous live burial. Furneaux explains that women who wished to marry suffered an 'experience of being dead in life, or existing in a "living grave"' under coverture laws, and authors like Mary Braddon (best known for *Lady Audley's Secret* of 1862) used this fear of being buried alive as a way to further discuss, via metaphor in their novels, the 'social death' that women endured when marrying (438). When analysing Lady Dedlock through the lens of this aforementioned 'social death', it is clear that the Lady is suffering a form of this 'living death' in her marriage to Sir Leicester as well as in her choice to forsake her earlier life as Miss Barbary. Because she has had a child out of wedlock as Miss Barbary and consequently has worked to cover up that living part of herself (Dickens was likely drawing upon the same metaphor that Furneaux describes), the Lady feels she is outside of the loving and redemptive grace of God. Her sins, as she views them, involve having a sexual relationship outside of wedlock and also actively seeking to hide this past. Covering up one's secrets is a subject upon which Dickens focused heavily, and *Bleak House* is a prime example of how he approached obfuscating the past. However, with Lady Dedlock's confession to Esther that she is in fact the young woman's 'unhappy

mother', followed by the Lady's death (a self-sacrifice at the pauper's grave of her lover), she chooses to be saved by a universal God's love and therefore is redeemed (565).

The idea that all humanity is able to gain redemption is a central theme of Dickens's works, as Vincent Newey argues. Newey notes that Dickens utilises a 'liberal humanism' in his works, which displaces the older, dogmatic rhetoric of puritanical Christianity (3, 19). The key idea about this form of humanism, Newey states, is that, although Dickens was Christian, 'Duty to God and concern for the state of the immortal soul have been succeeded by an insistent interest in healthy feelings and fruitful relationships with the outer world', and that these interactions with one's community are in fact what brings salvation (18). This 'liberal [Christian] humanism' is echoed by authors writing in the aftermath of the American Civil War, especially in the South. Joseph Gold's text on Faulkner and humanism mainly focuses on Faulkner's later works, but he argues in his introduction that 'Faulkner's humanism rests on a rock foundation of faith, almost of mysticism. … [God] is available to all men at all times if they will throw over systems and act out of acceptance and love' (14). Gold quotes from Faulkner's 1955 lecture tour of Japan to demonstrate that Faulkner felt himself most aligned with humanism: 'Well, I believe in God. Sometimes Christianity gets pretty debased, but I do believe in God, yes. I believe that man has a soul that aspires towards what we call God … the only school I belong to, that I want to belong to, is the humanist school' (Faulkner, quoted in Gold 7–8).[4] A feeling of having committed wrongs which need to be accounted for, coupled with people who are stuck in horrors of stagnation, poverty, and disease, people who are caught up in their heritage and unable to disassociate themselves from their pasts, culminates in the desire for redemption, and Faulkner in particular is a writer who focuses acutely on this topic. Byron Bunch sums up this culmination of emotions and circumstances when he says,

> Yes. A man will talk about how he'd like to escape from living folks. But it's the dead folks that do him the damage. It's the dead ones that lay quiet in one place and dont [*sic*] try to hold him, that he cant [*sic*] escape from. (*Light in August* 58)

With this statement, Bunch illustrates how the youth of the early 20th century fought to distance themselves from Civil War nostalgia. Arguably, the United States was founded on several horrors, the African slave trade and the genocide against the Native Americans, and Bunch here comments that these atrocities are haunting presences which ultimately 'do him the damage'.

In his final chapter in *Light in August*, the Reverend Hightower comments that he 'grew to manhood among phantoms, and side by side with a ghost', suggesting that his past and his Southern heritage were inescapable aspects of his childhood, as they were for many who grew up in the generations after the Civil War (356). He further narrates that he was never scared of the stories his

family's negro maid (who helped to raise him) told of his grandfather, who allegedly killed hundreds of men in the war, because he was just a ghost, 'never seen in the flesh, heroic, simple, warm' (359).[5] Hightower continues his narrative by describing the difference between these ghosts and phantoms 'which would never die' (359). The ghosts of memory and loss, as well as the presence of evil (as just described by Hightower) hold powerful places in *Light in August*, as in all of Faulkner's works, and are epitomised in the character Joe Christmas. Although Christmas's true identity remains a mystery to the various communities through which he moves, the townspeople have decided early on that an aura of evil surrounds him and this idea is based upon his physical appearance and rumours about his 'mixed race' parentage. Christmas appears out of nowhere at the planing mill where Byron Bunch works, a stranger in the town with 'something definitely rootless about him' (25). There is something contemptuous about the way he looks, to which the other mill workers do not take kindly. He appears at the mill in order to apply for a manual labour position though he is dressed in clothes which denote that he is above such a station: 'decent serge, sharply creased [with] a white shirt … a tie and a stiffbrim [*sic*] straw hat that was quite new, cocked at an angle arrogant and baleful above his still face' (25). As he goes to the mill office, the other workers in their 'faded and workstained overalls looked at his back with a sort of baffled outrage. "We ought to run him through the planer", the foreman said. "Maybe that will take that look off his face"' (25–6). Christmas remains a mystery to the Jeffersonians at the beginning of the novel: 'none of them knew then where Christmas lived and what he was actually doing behind the veil, the screen, of his negro's job at the mill' (29).

The purpose of the 'veil' that Faulkner tells us Christmas puts up is to keep his second job as a bootlegger hidden. However, this web of secrecy extends to Christmas's own past, and it is only when the narrative moves back into his memory that it becomes clear how harsh beginnings nurtured, or even planted, the evil within him which is the driving force of the novel. Of Christmas's childhood, the narrator tells us:

> Memory believes before knowing remembers. … Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big long gabled cold echoing building of dark red brick sootbleakened [*sic*] by more chimneys than its own, set in a grassless cinderstrewn-packed [*sic*] compound surrounded by smoking factory purlieus … where in random erratic surges … orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and out of remembering but in knowing constant as the bleak walls, the bleak windows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacenting [*sic*] chimneys streaked like black tears. (91)

This passage, an introduction to Christmas's childhood in an orphanage, has a direct thread of connection to the opening of *Bleak House*. Dickens poetically writes of the fog and mud on the streets of London, which paints an

impressionistic picture of rot and pestilence, later to become a metaphor for the Court of Chancery, the cause of many a character's downfall in the novel. The omniscient narrator tells us that 'never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth' (*BH* 50). Faulkner often reused his phrases for certain character types. He chose to describe one of his most tragic characters, Joe Christmas, in a manner hauntingly similar to that of Dickens's Chancery Court. The wetness, grime, and dirt that are associated with the orphanage building become associated with the children it houses, just as the fog and mud become one and the same with Chancery Court, the essence of evil within *Bleak House*. *Nicholas Nickleby* is also a novel which discusses orphanages, or Yorkshire Schools as they were deemed in the north, and focuses acutely on the skeletal imagery of the children housed there. Nicholas's introduction to Mr Squeers's establishment, 'Dotheboys Hall', is one that shocks and appals him, but he is powerless to do much more than observe the scene:

> Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men. … There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining … and lonesome even in their loneliness … what an incipient Hell was breeding there! (*NN* 97)

Hablot K. Browne's illustration (Figure 3.2) is another piece of evidence that reiterates the image of the orphans that Dickens wanted his readership to envision. Dressed in matching ragged uniforms, the boys line up for their weekly dose of brimstone, and their gaunt, skeletal bodies are all the more emphasised by this linear formation. One boy's emaciated face flows into the next, and it would appear that they fade into the walls and background of the Hall, forming a ghostly image that is striving to become invisible.

Christmas is also a ghostly child, but he stands alone and is different from the other orphans. The dietician whom he has accidentally observed in a compromising situation feels this difference more than anyone and seeks a way of having him removed from the orphanage by citing proof (however tenuous) of Christmas's race: 'Of course I knew it didn't mean anything when the other children called him Nigger. … They have been calling him that for years. Sometimes I think that children have a way of knowing things that grown people of your and my age dont [*sic*] see' (*Light in August* 102). Once the matron believes Christmas is of mixed race, she admits that he cannot stay at the white orphanage and must be placed with a family. Much like Oliver Twist, Christmas is seen to be a threat to his fellow orphans, albeit for different reasons. It is Oliver's caretaker, Mr Bumble, who asserts that the orphan is unlovable, and, similarly,

Figure 3.2: ***The Internal Economy of Dotheboys Hall***, etching by Hablot K. Browne (Phiz), 1838. Image copyright and related rights waived via CC0.

it is the person who is supposed to care for Christmas, the dietician of the orphanage, who declares that he is a 'little nigger bastard' (96). Likewise, Oliver is told by his caretaker that he will be sold by the parish as an apprentice at the price of 'three pound ten! … all for a naughty orphan which nobody can love' (*OT* 24). Early childhood memories of being turned out from adoptive homes that should be safe places of shelter haunt these orphans and imprint upon them their supposed 'differences' from their social peers.

At the orphanage, Christmas fades at will 'like a *shadow* … another in the corridor could not have said just when and where he vanished, into what door, what room' (*Light in August* 91, my emphasis). Thomas McHaney asserts that there is an association between ghosts and the reoccurring twilight and shadows in Faulkner's works. Twilight and fading light are particular to certain characters within *The Sound and the Fury*, and McHaney states that, through the repetition, twilight becomes a Wagnerian leitmotif and is subsequently associated with the consciousness of those characters. That Faulkner actively chooses to align Christmas with shadows in his earliest childhood representations further asserts the child's innate ghostly nature.[6] The dietician mistakenly thinks Christmas is hiding in her room to spy on her sexual relationship with an orphanage doctor; in actuality he is stealing her toothpaste to eat because of its sweet flavour, finishes the entire tube, and becomes ill. The dietician is 'stupid enough to believe that a child of five not only could deduce the truth from what he had heard, but that he would want to tell it as an adult would' and it is she who feels threatened by his knowledge of her wrongdoings and is haunted by his 'still, grave, inescapable, parchmentcoloured [*sic*] face, watching her' (94). All of the latter adjectives serve as more evidence of Christmas's perceived ghostliness, as his 'grave' and 'parchmentcoloured' face both denote a sense of sombre blankness. Christmas remains an enigma throughout the story, for, even when the reader learns of his isolated childhood spent in an orphanage and with an abusive adoptive family, his personality seems unknowable.[7]

From his introduction towards the beginning of the novel, an adult Joe Christmas is presented as the antagonist of the story both with the horrible things he does (the list is long and includes murders done with his bare hands) and the way in which he is physically presented. This attention to Christmas's physicality differentiates Faulkner from other writers of modernist fiction who actively choose not to focus on their characters' physical descriptions. With *Light in August*, Faulkner veers from the modernist movement in this respect, and writes this text using techniques more aligned with novels of the realist and naturalist movements, such as describing the characters' physical attributes and having those descriptions hint at their personalities. Faulkner himself, in a letter to his friend and editor Ben Wasson, wrote that *Light in August* was 'a novel: not an anecdote; that's why it seems topheavy [*sic*]' (Faulkner, quoted in Millgate 'A Novel' 31). Millgate speculates that the 'topheavy' quality originated from Faulkner having packed 'the novel with an extraordinary number and range of characters and of main and subsidiary narrative sequences', a

literary quality typically attributed to Dickens's works and others writing in the mid-Victorian era ('A Novel' 32). *Light in August*, then, varies from a typical Faulknerian work: in his other novels, Faulkner concentrates acutely on a small number of central characters and their public and private emotions and inner dialogues. It is a distinctive text because Faulkner was attempting to veer from his more 'anecdote'-based writing and sincerely put forth his efforts to write what he felt was 'a novel'. This endeavour required an attention to the physical presentations of his characters, as well as laying out their personal histories as he measured himself against the achievements of other great novelists.[8]

Faulkner presents Christmas as a malevolent stranger who appears in Jefferson without warning. Christmas's demeanour and physical appearance culminate in his being read by Jeffersonians as a person with questionable motives. At the height of Christmas's bootlegging business in Jefferson and before he allegedly murders Joanna Burden, we are given insight into a day of his life, which he spends mostly isolated in the woods near Burden's house. In the evening, he walks into town, which by nine o'clock is mostly deserted. The narrator describes him as looking '*more lonely than a lone telephone pole in the middle of a desert* … he looked like a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world, and lost' (*Light in August* 87, my emphasis). This sketch of Christmas is reminiscent of the orphans of Dotheboys Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby*, boys who are 'lonesome even in their loneliness' and who form a group of phantasmal entities with a gloomy presence (*NN* 97). With this description, Faulkner explains that it is Christmas's loneliness that subsequently causes him to be assigned to the realm of phantoms and the 'living dead', much like the orphans of Dotheboys Hall. Christmas passes a 'negro youth [who] ceased whistling and edged away [from Christmas] looking back over his shoulder' (*Light in August* 87). During Christmas's adolescence, he adopted a way of smoking a cigarette without touching it. He keeps a lit cigarette dangling 'in one side of his mouth', from which the smoke billows up and obscures that side of his face (25). Because Christmas's face is almost always half hidden by smoke, the result is that he is hardly ever fully seen, which draws upon the representations of well-known apparitions of Victorian ghost stories such as Marley. When Scrooge first sees Marley it is as a knocker on the former's front door. Scrooge at once sees and does not see the ghost: 'Marley's face. It was not in impenetrable shadow, as the other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it. … As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again' (*CC* 17). Marley's hair was 'curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air', implying that, in order to appear to Scrooge, Marley must be encased in his ('its' is the assigned pronoun) own atmosphere, even though the rest of the scene is motionless and ordinary (*CC* 16). Christmas's self-made atmosphere of cigarette smoke coupled with his 'inherently vicious' nature culminates in his being perceived as ghostly due to literary cues borrowed from Dickens (Millgate *The Achievement* 125).

Several Dickensian phantoms appear in their texts set apart from the natural environment of the everyday. The phantom of 'The Haunted Man and the

Ghost's Bargain' (1848) and the ghosts that haunt Toby Veck in *The Chimes* (1844) are two additional examples which appear in this manner, although Dickens puts a stronger emphasis on their shadowy natures than he does with Marley. In his creation of these phantoms, Dickens was drawing on his long-established interest in mesmerism. His belief in and practice of mesmerism spanned several decades of his life, beginning in the late 1830s when he came under the instruction of Dr John Elliotson, a physician and practising mesmerist at the University College Hospital in London. Much of the science of mesmerism is based on the belief that living beings are surrounded by an invisible fluid and this fluid can be tapped into and manipulated by the mesmerist. Although Dickens was not a spiritualist, many of mesmerism's cardinal beliefs have been inculcated into the ever-changing practice, and Harry Boddington writes about his mesmerist predecessors in a 1947 text on spiritualism. He states, 'What was called a universal fluid by Mesmer was merely another name for what is now called aura when it is invisible and psychoplasm when solidified' (211). Boddington further asserts that 'In clairvoyance … the sight of spirits is limited to the plane of consciousness wherein they dwell', meaning that the spiritualist or psychic will only be able to view a spirit in the entity's own 'spirit world' or dimension which can certainly account for the idea that a spirit would appear to the living in its own climate (308). Reading Dickensian ghost stories with this aforementioned auric fluid of mesmerism in mind, it becomes clear that the author was utilising mesmeric terminology in creating his ghostly characters, depicting them encased in their own bubbles of space in order to denote their having come from an unearthly place. Once this relationship between mesmerism and Dickens's ghosts has been established, it is clear that Faulkner picked up on the specific way in which Dickensian phantoms were written, and he depicted Christmas as encased in his own smoky atmosphere, further denoting the character's presence as phantasmal. At the very least, we comprehend that Christmas is someone to be avoided, which is conveyed with the 'negro youth's' reaction to Christmas's being ominous and otherworldly. As this youth edges away from Christmas on the street in town, readers familiar with Dickens's works are again reminded of Jo's fearful reaction to seeing a veiled Esther Summerson: 'I had not lifted my veil. … The boy staggered up instantly, and stared at me with a remarkable expression of surprise and terror' (*BH* 485). In the confusion of his fever, he mistakes Esther for Lady Dedlock, whom his mind has turned into a spectre that he must perpetually accompany to 'the berryin [*sic*] ground' (485).

After the phantasmal introduction to Christmas in town, the narrative allows access into his memory to see what shaped and grew the perceived evil within him. Despite the innocence of childhood, which is asserted in the New Testament and is emphasised in Christmas's case by his namesake, Christmas cannot escape the dogmatic rhetoric of Protestant Christianity that dominated the South and focuses on 'original sin'.[9] Dickensian characters that also embody this more Calvinistic approach to Christianity are prevalent throughout his

works, and it is worth mentioning that it is Miss Barbary, Lady Dedlock's sister, who raises Esther in secret and imprints upon her the notion of having been born into sin, and that sin is therefore an inescapable factor of her life. This is the main construction of Esther's mental prison, from which she works to be released throughout the novel. Christmas too works throughout the novel to escape from this self-made prison, but unlike Esther he seeks his release through acts of violence (a trait which Flannery O'Connor, another author of the Southern Gothic genre, utilises in many of her pieces). The janitor of Christmas's first home, the orphanage (in actuality his biological grandfather, Doc Hines), who spirits him away once his mixed race is discovered, is convinced that Christmas is evil: 'I know evil. Aint [*sic*] I made evil to get up and walk God's world? A walking pollution to God's own face I made it. Out of the mouths of little children He never concealed it' (*Light in August* 98). Although Hines and Christmas had never exchanged more than 'a hundred words [Christmas] knew that there was something between them that did not need to be spoken' (*Light in August* 105). Hines's attention to Christmas comes out of a sense of having done evil of biblical proportions, an Old Testament theme that humanity is born into sin, and Christmas's mere existence (in Hines's mind) is his punishment. Hines is also drawn to Christmas because of the circumstances of his birth; because Hines's daughter committed a sin in having Christmas with a supposed 'black man' out of wedlock, Christmas is assumed to have inherited his mother's and father's sin of lust, as well as being of mixed race, which to Hines equates to an ability to perpetuate evil.

Christmas's troubled childhood continues when he is adopted by the McEachern family, who promise that the boy 'will grow up to fear God and abhor idleness and vanity despite his origin' (*Light in August* 109). His new caregivers further imprint a sense of hopelessness upon a young Christmas, and their belief in humanity's inescapable original sin propels him down a path of negativity sought out of retaliation and despair. It is in the McEachern house, a place where physical and emotional violence takes the place of love, that Christmas's desire to withdraw from humanity is cemented. An adolescence spent in the company of Mr McEachern, a religious bigot similar in character to Esther's aunt Miss Barbary, leaves Joe unable to understand love or to delineate between good and evil. Alexander Welsh writes that Christmas had 'two oppressive adoptive fathers … of a peculiarly Calvinist stamp', and being raised by these men resulted in moulding Christmas into 'a killer' (128). When Joe is just eight, McEachern beats him for not being able to memorise biblical verses. The beatings are cold-blooded and, to Joe, seem to be more of a ritual than an emotion-filled reaction to what McEachern views as Joe's stubbornness.[10] The fact that his adoptive father cannot muster any feelings, positive or negative, while beating his son suggests that there is never any emotion expressed for him by McEachern. Mrs McEachern secretly brings Joe a tray of food after her husband leaves the house that evening. Her clandestine feedings are done out of love and pity for the boy, but they are also performed out of a self-serving

need to form a relationship with her adopted son, to build a bridge of connection between herself and someone else apart from her abusive husband. Joe's reaction to the secreted food is to throw it on the floor in the corner, breaking the plates. This refusal is a learned reaction because Joe, who has never experienced a bond with another human being outside of a violent one, is 'constituted as to be unable to accept love or pity' and has no other emotional means with which to react to the food offering (Welsh 126). So we see that it is the physical violence inflicted upon Joe while living with the McEacherns that raises him and makes him into 'a man' (*Light in August* 111).

As Faulkner said in his lectures to graduate students, Christmas is not born 'bad' as Hines believes, but is made 'tragic' because of the actions of others.[11] Years later, Joe remembers his private reaction to Mrs McEachern's spoiled food in the corner of his room after she leaves. It is a Jungian archetypal memory for Joe in that it is one that shapes his consciousness and is one of his founding memories: 'he rose from the bed and went and knelt in the corner … and above the outraged food kneeling, with his hands ate, like a savage, a dog' (*Light in August* 118). For Christmas, food, sex, and women are confusedly tied together in his mind, and he cannot understand one without the other. Food invariably recalls the memory of eating the dietician's toothpaste at the orphanage. Like a row of toppling dominos, this brings to mind the sexual encounter he accidentally witnessed there. When Mrs McEachern tries to give Christmas food, his adolescent mind relives early childhood experiences of secret eating, witnessing a sexual encounter, then vomiting and being found out. The young Christmas feels that these events caused him to be exiled from the only home he had known, another dark milestone in a long line of traumatic incidents. Never having known and therefore understood what the New Testament tells us is the grace of God's love, Joe's concept of Christianity, and arguably his world, is shaped around violence and an Old Testament God who doles out punishments as McEachern does. Christmas's isolated childhood, coupled with his subsequent physical representation as an adult in Jefferson as described earlier, culminate in his phantom-ness; he exists within our world, yet outside of it, as he is human but without humanity.

Like Christmas, Hightower is another of the 'living dead', stuck in the personally constructed prison of his mind. As Christmas was imprinted negatively by the stewards of his childhood, so too Hightower describes an adolescence filled with emotional coldness at the hands of his father. Hightower remembers his father as a lonely figure who 'had been a minister without a church and a soldier without an enemy' and therefore 'combined the two' and became a doctor (*Light in August* 356). In this narration, Hightower decides that his father 'had become not defeated and not discouraged [by life in the South], but wiser. … As if he came suddenly to believe that Christ had meant that him whose spirit alone required healing, was not worth the having, the saving' (*Light in August* 356). We come to learn about Hightower through small glimpses like these, caught here and there between the main action-heavy plot

concerning Joe Christmas. Jeffersonians describe him as tangling religion and his own family heritage together in an indecipherable mush, that he was 'born about thirty years after the only day he seemed to have ever lived in—that day when his grandfather was shot from the galloping horse—' (*Light in August* 48). This tangling of the past and present culminates in forming another type of self-constructed mental imprisonment for Hightower. He constructs this self-punishment similarly to Christmas, Lady Dedlock and Esther of *Bleak House*. The Lady believes in the truth of her sin, and it is this belief structure that creates the frozen life she currently lives. The same can be asserted of Christmas and Esther as their respective upbringings in violent and dogmatic Christian homes formed for them their truths. Hightower constructs his reality through stories of his past heritage as well as a carefully cultivated understanding of the Church: 'He had believed in the church too, in all that it ramified and evoked … if ever there was shelter, it would be the church; that if ever truth could walk naked and without shame or fear, it would be in the seminary' (*Light in August* 359).

Coupling Hightower's narrative with Christmas's death makes the significance of the latter's demise more clear, in that to gain a greater understanding of Christmas's death, one must understand Hightower's story. As mentioned earlier, it is through Lady Dedlock's confession of her past transgressions to Esther (namely that she had Esther out of wedlock and then unknowingly abandoned her to live a cold adolescence with her sister, a religious zealot) and her death that she is able to have a spiritual redemption. This redemption comes to her through the forgiveness offered her by both Esther and her widowed husband, Sir Leicester Dedlock. Although he is 'invalided, bent, and almost blind' he rides past the Dedlock mausoleum with his attendant George, then 'pulling off his hat, is still for a few moments before they ride away' (*BH* 928). Archbishop Dr Rowan Williams noted that Dickens's view of forgiveness is seen in the mercy and compassion Sir Leicester exhibits for his deceased wife. In Williams's bicentenary speech in 2012, he argued that in Sir Leicester 'we have something of the hope of mercy. Almost silent, powerless, Sir Leicester after his stroke, dying slowly in loneliness, and stubbornly holding open the possibility that there might be, once again, love and harmony'. It is the Lady's death that changes the lives of the characters around her, enabling this compassion to be felt, and it is in this that another correlation between the two works can be identified.

As with Lady Dedlock, Christmas's death and its aftermath are central to the text. The events leading up to Christmas's murder are narrated by Gavin Stevens, a district attorney who is from a family 'who is old in Jefferson' (*Light in August* 333). If for no other purpose, Stevens's specified heritage lends credence to his speculations on Christmas, because his status as a *real* Jeffersonian provides him with a platform for theorising an accurate portrayal of the situation. Stevens makes his first appearance as a character in this one chapter, explaining to a visiting friend from Harvard (who, like the reader, is an outsider to

this story) why he thinks Christmas fled to Hightower's house. Some in town explain the odd choice of refuge as 'Like to like' (again, another allusion to Christmas's and Hightower's perceived similarities as outsiders) but Stevens, the narrator tells us, 'had a different theory' (*Light in August* 333). While he acknowledges that he does not think anyone could piece together what truly happened, Stevens opines that what drove Christmas to Hightower was a belief that the minister could offer him 'sanctuary [from] the very irrevocable past [from] whatever crimes had moulded and shaped him and left him high and dry' (*Light in August* 337). Stevens further speculates on the internal argument he believes Christmas's mixed blood has during his escape, speculating that Christmas's 'black blood drove him first to the negro cabin [and] his white blood … sent him to the minister [that it was] his black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it' (*Light in August* 337). While Dickens was not the first to pen racial stereotypes in Western literature, he does describe Neville Landless of Ceylon in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), who has recently immigrated to England, as having 'something of the tiger in his dark blood', and he demonstrates this internal rage when he fights with Edwin Drood shortly after meeting him (70). Helena Landless, the twin sister of Neville, shares his complexion but is exempt from this wild rage because of her feminine nature and ability to adopt the domestic knowledge imparted to her by Miss Twinkleton's school and her English friend, Rosa. Although armed, Christmas chooses not to fire his weapon at anyone; instead, Stevens relates that 'he crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand' (*Light in August* 338). Stevens's belief is that Christmas wanted to continue to defy the 'black blood' within him, which surely (according to Stevens) would have pushed Christmas to use the pistol.

Christmas is the victim of a gruesome death at the hands of town vigilantes who shoot and then castrate him after his escape from the town jail. Like Lady Dedlock, it is through death that Christmas is released from the 'cage' that is his 'own flesh' (*Light in August* 122). Christmas lies dying on the floor of Hightower's kitchen, where he has sought refuge after his escape. In the following profound scene, his soul is released from the prison of his body, where it was trapped, both enduring and doling out evil throughout his life:

> For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. … It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful [*sic*], but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. (*Light in August* 349–50)

His eyes are 'peaceful' yet 'unfathomable and unbearable' as his body collapses inward like a deflating balloon and his blood gushes out of him. His body becomes 'pale', further emphasising his ghostliness and the release of his spirit. Mark 15:37–15:39 details the death of Christ and narrates that a centurion who stood near Jesus as he died 'saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost [and] he said, Truly this man was the Son of God'. The witnesses of these deaths (Christmas's and Christ's) are subconsciously moved to feel a profound awe at these scenes. With this depiction of Christmas's blood jetting forth while his body collapses, there is another correlation between Christmas and Christ. Christ's blood is mentioned throughout the New Testament, but John 1:7 particularly details that it is the blood of Jesus Christ that can permanently cleanse us of our sins. By writing that Christmas rose 'into their memories' and will continue to remain there 'triumphant', Faulkner makes it clear that Christmas's larger purpose is to be a sacrifice for the greater salvation of humanity. Christmas's death scene is rife with metaphorical allusions which point to the imprint his consciousness makes upon the four men in the room and upon the Jeffersonian community as a whole. Christmas, like Christ, does not commit a literal suicide, but is murdered at the hands of those who wish to repudiate him; however, it is through his death that these same citizens are offered salvation.

From his self-sacrifice Christmas gains release from the imprisonment of living death that he has been enduring. Christmas comes to an epiphany while he is in hiding that what he has been searching for in all his 'thirty years' was peace, 'to become one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair' (*Light in August* 249).[12] Once again, Christmas and Twist, as outsider orphans, share a similar longing for peace. During Oliver's apprenticeship to the undertaker Sowerberry, 'he wished, as he crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin, and that he could be laid in a calm and lasting sleep in the churchyard ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head' (*OT* 38). Although Oliver does not die in his novel, he wishes for an end to the constant battle that is his life. Christmas's struggle for peace in his 'thirty years' is the result of a lifetime of ill treatment but is also another shadowing of Christ's life and Passion. Like Lady Dedlock of *Bleak House*, Christmas is doomed by his past; he feels unable to escape his history and so does not attempt to create a better future. Whereas Lady Dedlock gains a place in society by marrying Sir Leicester, she does so through deceiving him about her illegitimate child and greater past love for Captain Hawdon. While the Lady is certainly not actively evil (as some would claim Christmas is), there is a shared pattern in the loss of hope that drives both to isolated states lived outside of their respective communities. The Lady's reaction to her perceived estrangement from society is to be 'bored to death' by everyone and everything (*BH* 56). She seeks a way to turn away from the world and to become mentally stagnant, thus shutting out her memories of loss. Conversely, Christmas's detachment culminates in his actively seeking a war with the world around him. These characters' reactions to tragedy are different but their respective isolated states are eerily similar:

neither can escape the turmoil of his/her past and remain trapped, so much so that their histories keep them from living. Although, in both style and plot, it is a drastically different novel to any he had written before, *Light in August* is one of Faulkner's 'greatest achievements … and is central to any evaluation or understanding of his career as a whole' (Millgate 'Introduction' 12). Arguably by using realist narrative techniques in the novel and being less experimental, Faulkner was able to fully convey the greater effect his central characters' story lines had upon their communities. Before *Light in August*, Faulkner focused with an acute clarity on the innermost thoughts of a handful of characters, but with this novel, he broadened his scope to depict eloquently the traumas of being an outsider.[13]

The interest we have in the plight of the 'other' comes from our own desire to be witness to such haunting and grotesque characters, to fully see the spectacle of the 'freak'. In her introduction to *Freakery*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson states that 'By challenging the boundaries of the … natural world, monstrous bodies [appear] as sublime, merging the terrible with the wonderful, equalising repulsion with attraction' (*Freakery* 3). Dickens expressed this same odd coupling of emotions through David when he meets the detestable Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* for the first time. David is both repulsed and fascinated by Uriah; he does not wish to be in his company, yet he cannot keep away and even goes so far as to invite Uriah into his own home so that he might gain a closer look at Uriah's 'freakishness'. Dickens has written several times on this equalisation of 'repulsion with attraction', as Garland-Thomson calls it, and referred to the feeling as 'the attraction of repulsion', citing it as being a part of human nature (Dickens 'Letters on Social Questions: Capital Punishment'). Hollington defines the grotesque in just these terms, as 'contradictory sensations … the romantic, the fantastic or the gothic com[ing] into collision with the 'real' world … to produce the paradoxically mixed and contradictory art of the grotesque' (24). Garland-Thomson further asserts that mainstream society is drawn to want to view the 'freak', so as to feel 'comfortably common … by the exchange' (*Freakery* 5). If this discourse on the freak in recent years is applied to the outsider characters in Dickens's and Faulkner's works, it is clear that these figures have purpose in their grotesquery: they help to fulfil 'mainstream' society's desire to feel a sense of safety in their own bodies, the view of the 'other' rendering them happily 'normal' by comparison. These 'living dead' characters provide the perfect canvas upon which to paint a grotesquely beautiful depiction of these 'others' for the rest of society to gaze upon.

Millgate notes that Faulkner did not only want 'to tell the stories of [the characters] but also, and perhaps primarily, to show the impact of these stories upon the people of Jefferson' (*The Achievement* 126). It is important to note that this theme (the potential impact of one person's life upon his/her community) is another which is often associated with Dickens. Millgate makes the point several times that the reader, also an outsider to the community, is brought into the story to join the social community of Jefferson which has condemned

Christmas 'on sight' (*The Achievement* 125). However, Millgate asserts that this verdict of Christmas's 'inherently vicious and worthless' nature must be amended when the reader is given insight into Christmas's adolescence (125). He summates that the greatest strength of the novel is 'the passion of its presentation of Joe Christmas … and the way in which we, like all the characters in the book, are irresistibly swept into the vortex of Christmas's restless life and agonising death' (137). As the narrative moves to describe Christmas's troubled past, the reader, the sole witness to these memories, is moved to reassess his/her previously formed conceptions of Christmas, and is made to empathise with him despite his wrongdoings. Once empathy is successfully felt for Christmas, a tie is formed between him and those who condemned him, and the narrative completes its critique that the 'other' may not be so different from the supposed 'norm'.

Christmas is aligned with what Garland-Thomson refers to as 'the sight of an unexpected body', especially in his death scene, as he 'attracts interest but … also … disgust' (*Staring* 37). Christmas disrupts our expectations of societal normalcy, which 'is at once novel and disturbing', and this disruption 'forces us to look and notice' (Garland-Thomson *Staring* 37). Taking what Garland-Thomson asserts in her works, the communities in these texts desire to form a united front before which characters like Christmas and Dedlock are pushed further outward and ostracised, in order to feel a sense of normalcy in their own bodies as was mentioned, and this group formation becomes a force that is an entity and a character unto itself. Welsh remarks that 'The community comes alive, just as it does in *Oliver Twist*, when there is a fire to watch and a murderer to be hunted down. … Faulkner's satire of the inhabitants of Jefferson … is acute and reflective' (134). Faulkner creates this social satire, which is purposely contrasted to the phantasmal outsider Christmas, in order to move the reader to see a parallel between his/her previously held judgements and those of the community. The inevitable outcome is that the reader becomes troubled by his/her attitudes and begins to question the previously held opinion of Christmas's inherent evil nature. Lady Dedlock and Joe Christmas share with Christ the experience of being repudiated by their 'normal' communities. The self-sacrifice that both of these unconventional characters perform in their respective novels provides the catalyst for humanity's growth and perseverance. Faulkner spoke of this drive to persevere in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1950: '[humanity] is immortal … he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart' (Faulkner, quoted in Welsh 138). This statement is strikingly similar to the opening preface of *Household Words*, written by Dickens on 30 March 1850. Dickens writes that the publication's aim is to 'tenderly cherish that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nurture, 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). Both Dickens and

Faulkner can be seen to have shared the sense that it was an author's duty to show his/her world what the human spirit could accomplish: 'To show to all, that in all familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough, if we will find it out' (Dickens 'Preliminary' 1).

Both authors demonstrate the importance of looking below the 'repellent … surface' in their depictions of those who are spiritually entombed. These characters, who, as Faulkner said, are victims of their own minds, or their 'fellows, or [their] own nature[s], or [their] environment[s]', are repudiated by their communities but they are still very much a part of those same communities (Faulkner, quoted in Gwynn and Blotner 118). The result of this observation is that there can be no 'normal' collective without an 'outsider' because, as polar opposites, they define each other. Lady Dedlock finds peace through dying alongside the grave of her great lost love, Captain Hawdon (Nemo). Esther describes how '[s]he lay there, with one arm creeping round a bar of the iron gate, and seeming to embrace it … my mother, cold and dead' (*BH* 868–9). Through self-sacrifice (the Lady banishes herself from Sir Leicester and Chesney Wold with all of their upper-class comforts) and a rather gruesome death (which can be seen as suicide), she gains her salvation at the grave of Hawdon. Even more importantly, Esther and the community which had forced the Lady into social exile are able to share in her salvation through witnessing the death. Christmas's death is much more grisly than Lady Dedlock's, but there is a shared state of epiphany and salvation in which the community jointly shares.

Millgate asserts that 'What *Light in August* does explore … is the central Faulknerian theme of the past's relation to the present … [a past] from which society can never hope to free itself but from which the individual must never cease struggling to escape' ('A Novel' 44). Both Dickens and Faulkner were working with a Christian version of humanism, which states that, through a universal love and a belief in the importance of humanity itself, deliverance can be obtained by anyone, no matter how dark their earthly lives. Vincent Newey notes that Dickens's 'plan of salvation can be the more clearly understood against the backcloth of Puritan conversion narrative', such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), stating further that Dickens's texts replace 'one ideology (old-style religion) with another (humanism)' (19). For his children in 1849, Dickens wrote a chronicle of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ titled *The Life of Our Lord* (published in 1934). It is interesting to note what Dickens chooses to leave out of his children's education about Christ: the more mystical details such as the Immaculate Conception and transubstantiation are glossed over. Instead, the foci are Jesus's adult life: the miracles he performed and his Passion. Dickens tells his children that Jesus chose his disciples:

> from among Poor Men, in order that the Poor might know—always after that; in all years to come—that Heaven was made for them as well as for the rich, and that God makes no difference between those who

> wear good clothes and those who go barefoot and in rags. The most miserable, the most ugly, deformed, wretched creatures that live, will be bright Angels in Heaven if they are good here on earth… . (*Life of Our Lord* 33)

The above is crucial to an understanding of Dickens's concept of the Christian faith. Lady Dedlock and Joe Christmas gain this love despite their pasts, and to Dickens and Faulkner all of humanity is capable of achieving the same. In 1957, a University of Virginia student observed to Faulkner that, in *Light in August*, 'much of the action seems to stem from almost fanatical Calvinism' (quoted in Gwynn and Blotner 73). The student further asked that, if Faulkner favoured an 'individual rather than an organised religion', would it be correct to say that he believed 'that man must work out his own salvation from within rather than without?' (73). Faulkner's reply was simply, 'I do, yes' (Faulkner, quoted in Gwynn and Blotner 73). Jesus tells his followers that he is 'the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life' (*King James Bible*, John 8:11). Dickens firmly believed that Jesus's purpose as a human man on this Earth was to demonstrate that all people are equal in the eyes of God, and, therefore, how one treats others in his/her community, is of the utmost importance: 'TO DO GOOD always—even to those who do evil to us. … If we do this … we may confidently hope that God will forgive us our sins and mistakes, and enable us to live and die in Peace' (*Life of Our Lord* 122). Despite the ghosts of their pasts, Lady Dedlock and Joe Christmas find the light of Christ and attain salvation through death, sharing that redemption with the societies which had rejected them, much as the New Testament tells us that Christ died so that mankind might gain salvation.

Endnotes

[1] As referenced earlier, Joseph Blotner's catalogue of Faulkner's libraries shows that Faulkner owned two large volume sets of Dickens (one housed at Rowan Oak and the other at his cottage in Charlottesville, Virginia). Blotner asserts that 'Not one of these books contains any comments or interlineations from his hand. [Faulkner's] special favorites, however, are marked not only by inscriptions by also by duplicates. … These were among those books which he read in youth and reread throughout his life, dipping into them for the sake of the characters, he used to say, as one would go into a room to visit an old friend' (8–9).

[2] According to biographers, Faulkner was an avid reader throughout his youth: 'although he never finished high school he read omnivorously … the extent and depth of Faulkner's reading should never be underestimated' (Millgate 'Introduction' 2). Additionally, Millgate asserts 'Faulkner's familiarity with English and European literature has often been ignored or

underestimated by American critics, and the result has sometimes been not simply a misunderstanding of the nature and sources of many of his images and allusions but an insufficiently generous conception of the whole scale and direction of his endeavour' (Millgate *The Achievement* 162).

[3] I have written about Dickens's ghostly characters and the ways in which they are represented in my master's thesis, 'Dickens, Decay and Doomed Spirits: Ghosts and the Living Dead in the Works of Charles Dickens' for the University of Leicester, 2013.

[4] This statement is taken from *Faulkner at Nagano* (1956).

[5] Faulkner recycled from his own life the close relationship between a young boy and his nursemaid for his character Hightower. One of Faulkner's biographers, David Minter, writes that the Falkners' [original spelling] maid, 'Mammy Callie' provided a very real source of familial love and affection to the Falkner boys when they were growing up in Oxford. Caroline Barr was born into slavery and, although she was '[u]nable to read or write, she remembered scores of stories about the old days and the old people: about slavery, the War, the Klan, and the Falkners' (13). Additionally, the nurse/child relationship is one that was also a major source of entertainment in Dickens's childhood, as is recorded both in his many biographies and in the instalment of 'The Uncommerical Traveller' mentioned earlier. Harry Stone wrote that the Dickens's maid, Mary Weller, had a similar impact upon the Dickens children with the occult horror stories she would tell her young wards. Mary had 'a baleful imagination that embroidered and personalised everything that she related. Dickens proved an ideal audience, and [she] practised on him endlessly' (Stone, quoted in Haining 4).

[6] See McHaney, Thomas. *Literary Masterpieces: The Sound and the Fury*. The Gale Group, 2000, pp. 72–3.

[7] In a graduate course on American Fiction at the University of Virginia, Faulkner says that Christmas's 'tragedy' was that 'he didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing … the most tragic condition a man could find himself in [is] not to know what he is and to know that he will never know' (Faulkner, quoted in Gwynn and Blotner 72).

[8] Millgate theorises that Faulkner 'in writing *Light in August* … set out to lay claim, once and for all, to the status of a major novelist … [it would be] a 'big' novel capable of standing alongside the greatest novels of the past' ('A Novel' 41). Millgate comes to this conclusion based on Faulkner's own recollections of writing this work: '"I was deliberately choosing among possibilities and probabilities of behavior and weighing and measuring each choice by the scale of the Jameses and Conrads and Balzacs"' (Faulkner, quoted in Millgate 'A Novel' 41). This drive of Faulkner's to have *Light in August* stand next to its literary predecessors explains his choices in examining the details of Christmas's and Hightower's lives more closely.

[9] The New Testament speaks of the innocence of children several times, most notably in the Gospel of Mark, when Christ demonstrates the impor-

tance of children by saying: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God' (*King James Bible*, Mark 10:14).

[10] In *Writers and Critics: William Faulkner* (1961), Millgate also acknowledges McEachern's ceremonial behaviour towards his adopted son, writing that Christmas achieves knowledge of his identity through the 'episodes of violence [which] have an almost ritualistic aspect' (46). Millgate asserts that the outcome of this behaviour is that 'Christmas hates McEachern, but at least he acts predictably, according to the code of behavior that is as clearly defined as it is inflexible' (46).

[11] In another University of Virginia lecture, Faulkner further spoke about Christmas, saying that, 'his only salvation in order to live with himself was to repudiate man-kind, to live outside the human race. And he tried to do that but nobody would let him, the human race itself wouldn't let him. And I don't think he was bad, I think he was tragic' (Faulkner, quoted in Gwynn and Blotner 118).

[12] The search for peace is also broached in *Sanctuary* with Horace Benbow, who quotes the Percy Shelley poem 'To Jane: The Recollection' (1792–1822). Horace Benbow 'began to say something out of a book he had read: "Less oft is peace. Less oft is peace"' (Faulkner *Sanctuary* 206–7).

[13] In a *New York Times Book Review* from 9 October 1932, J. Donald Adams wrote of *Light in August*: 'That somewhat crude and altogether brutal power which thrust itself through [Faulkner's] previous work is in this book disciplined to a greater effectiveness than one would have believed possible in so short a time' (Adams, quoted in Millgate 'A Novel' 13).

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CHAPTER 4

‘Awaiting the death blow’: Gendered Violence and Miss Havisham’s Afterlives

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> ‘If you knew all my story’, she pleaded, ‘you would have some compassion for me and a better understanding of me.’
> ‘Miss Havisham’, I answered, as delicately as I could, ‘I believe I may say that I do know your story…’
>
> (Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*)

In a novel that is, otherwise, largely about deception, this short exchange between Pip Pirrip, the protagonist of Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861) and Miss Havisham, the emotionally abusive spinster who haunts Satis House in her withered wedding gown, stands as a moment of integrity. Here, Havisham ‘pleads’ – as Dickens put it – for empathy from Pip (and therein the reader) because, as she implies, there is a rationale (albeit a troubling one) for her lifelong manipulation of Pip and her stepdaughter, Estella, which stems from violence and deceit (366). Being careful not to agitate the elder woman further, Pip gently reveals that he is already fully aware of Havisham’s past. Thanks to Herbert Pocket, on his arrival in London, Pip had

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learned that, at a much younger age, Miss Havisham had been cruelly overthrown by a professional conman, the villainous Mr Compeyson, who had conspired with her half-brother, Arthur, to defraud her of her inheritance, before then abandoning her on their wedding day. Havisham had, as Herbert put it, 'passionately loved' and 'perfectly idolised' Compeyson with 'all the susceptibility she possessed' (*GE* 177). But, traumatised by the brutality and manipulation she had suffered, Miss Havisham turned to misandry. Using her stepdaughter, Estella, as a weapon, Havisham trained the young woman to be 'hard and haughty and capricious to the last degree' and 'wreak revenge on all the male sex' for Compeyson's cruel and criminal behaviour (*GE* 173).

Despite the charge of misogyny so often levied at Dickens, here is one of the instances where he invites compassion for women. Pip, the novel's flawed hero, reports to Havisham that her story has 'inspired' him 'with great commiseration, and I hope I understand it and its influences' (*GE* 366).[1] Yet, while *Great Expectations* provides *some* insight into how the young and beautiful expectant bride morphed into the 'immensely rich and grim lady who lived in a large and dismal house barricaded against robbers, and who led a life of seclusion', Dickens does not show us the traumatic events, merely their extended aftermath (*GE* 66). Put another way, we do not get see how Miss Havisham 'became' Miss Havisham, so to speak.

Nonetheless, the iconic nature of Dickens's 'most compelling and most haunting' matriarch has been seized upon by contemporary adaptors who have reworked the 'gothic potential' (Slater 291) of Dickens's 'most sinister, spectacular bride' in new and various guises (Regis and Wynne 37). Onscreen, Miss Havisham has been reimagined in numerous film and television adaptations of *Great Expectations* and animated by many of the 20th and 21st century's most celebrated actors, including Martita Hunt in David Lean's iconic 1946 production, as well more recently by Charlotte Rampling (1999), Gillian Anderson (2011), and Helena Bonham Carter (2012), among others. Elsewhere, Havisham's life and death have inspired musical theatre. Dominick Argento's opera *Miss Havisham's Fire* (1979/1996), memorably subtitled 'Being an investigation into the unusual and violent death of Aurelia Havisham on the 17 of April in the year 1860', reworks Miss Havisham's life story as the subject of investigative scrutiny. Likewise, the darkness of Miss Havisham's rage has been immortalised in verse by the former poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy. In 'Havisham', a short poem published in Duffy's collection *Mean Time* (1993), the poet reimagines the morbid anger felt by Dickens's jilted bride as she reflected on her trauma from old age:

> Beloved sweetheart bastard. Not a day since then
> I haven't wished him dead. Prayed for it
> so hard I've dark green pebbles for eyes,
> ropes on the back of my hands I could strangle with.
> … I stabbed at a wedding cake.

> Give me a male corpse for a long slow honeymoon.
> Don't think it's only the heart that b-b-b-breaks. (Duffy 1–4, 15–16).

Duffy's poetic monologue emphasises the violence of Miss Havisham's emotions, something she relays through profanity as well as the references to Havisham's murderous desire. In the hyperbolic breakdown of the final sentence, Duffy brings together the speaker's pain with the vengeful cut that the speaker wishes to inflict on her former fiancé; just as her heart broke, so too will his, and slowly, it seems. But, amid the rage expressed here, Duffy's poem also implicitly alerts us to something else: namely, that there are long-term and devastating effects to the experience of criminal and domestic violence, something also vividly relayed by Dickens's original novel, where the reader bears after-witness to the legacy of Havisham's trauma.

More recently, 21st-century authors and screenwriters have returned to Dickens's ill-fated bride, with many, like Duffy, portraying the violent incidents from Havisham's backstory.[2] In particular, neo-Victorian works like Ronald Frame's novel *Havisham* (2012) and Tony Jordan's BBC drama *Dickensian* (2015) have appropriated the brief glimpses of Havisham's past offered by Dickens and fleshed them out to imagine more fully to show the trail of events that led to her ill-fated wedding day. Frame's book, which was published in the year of Dickens's bicentenary, presents Miss Havisham's tale via a first-person, retrospective biography, beginning with her own traumatic birth (as a breech baby) that resulted in her mother's death and concluding with the events of *Great Expectations*. Jordan's drama, meanwhile, builds on his expertise in soap opera, incorporating Havisham's story into a wildly playful mash-up of Dickens's most iconic characters. It too focuses on the immediate events prior to the fateful wedding day, specifically the fraudulent conspiracy surrounding the wealthy heiress.

As Clare Clark remarked in her review of Frame's novel for *The Guardian*, these particular prequels intentionally 'recast Miss Havisham as a woman of flesh and blood' (para. 5). She is no longer the cadaverous Miss Havisham of Dickens's novel or, indeed, Miss Havisham at all; instead, she is a young woman granted subjectivity, something bestowed on her symbolically by the attribution of a first name: in Frame's novel, she is Catherine, and in *Dickensian* Amelia. But, as Clark also noted, in 'making a real person of her', the prequels are obliged to 'explain all the awkward logistical quibbles that Dickens imperiously overlooked' (para. 5). In other words, they must portray the criminal conspiracy that led to Miss Havisham's destruction, as well as render visible her gothic 'becoming' (so to speak); *that* is their *raison d'*être.

However, as numerous commentators have suggested, neo-Victorianism – as a genre – often engages critically with injustices of the past, especially those relating to gender, sexuality, race, disability, and class. In fact, as Cora Kaplan put it, neo-Victorian texts are celebrated for their 'critique of the less admirable Victorian values and practices – those attitudes, institutions or social conditions

described as "Dickensian'" (81). But if, as noted, neo-Victorian reimaginings of Dickens's hopeful bride-to-be necessarily aver this very point, what are the ethical and cultural issues at stake in such Dickensian prequels?

In considering Dickens's afterlives, then, this chapter considers the politics of representation at play in prequels to *Great Expectations*. Building on Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben's observation that neo-Victorian texts are not always motivated by the 'best of intentions' (23) and can be, as Helen Davies has noted, 'sensationalist, cynical, trivialising, coarse' (8), this chapter explores the feminist politics of *Havisham* and *Dickensian*. I argue that, despite their representation of romance fraud, both Frame's novel and Jordan's screenplay exhibit an unsettling preoccupation with gendered violence. While, as noted, the rehumanising of Dickens's larger-than-life recluse necessarily portray misogyny and forms of domestic abuse (physical, emotional, and financial), Jordan and Frame rework these abject states and embellish – rather than critique – scenes of gendered violence.

In approaching my argument, this chapter begins with a contextual discussion of narrative ethics with regard to neo-Victorians prequels concerned with trauma, before examining the representation of physical violence in *Dickensian*. I then turn to the portrayal of emotional violence in Frame's novel, before offering a comparative reading of the sensationalism of trauma in the portrayal of Miss Havisham's wedding day. Across these readings, I will show how these sources employ various storytelling strategies to animate uncomfortably Dickens's short tale of gendered violence.

The violence of knowingness

In her invaluable conceptualisation of neo-Victorianism, Andrea Kirchknopf remarks that prequels, sequels, and 'after' texts are nearly always 'exclusively referential to dramatic, filmic or fictional adaptations of Victorian material', and this undoubtedly informs their popularity (72). But what also interests Kirchknopf is how the presence of such referential knowledge also reflects a change in 21st-century 'reading habits' (72). For Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, such habits refer, in fact, to an 'authorial knowingness' on the part of the writer that actively 'collude[s] with readers' because 'we' – the author and viewer – already know what will happen to the characters that we are reading of (15).

In the case of prequels to *Great Expectations* this means watching a brutal tale of criminal violence against a young woman unfold and witnessing the trauma that ensues. Havisham's tale presents a story of romance fraud (or 'sweetheart swindle'), a crime whereby an individual is defrauded by through 'what the victim had perceived as a genuine relationship' (Cross, Dragiewicz, and Richards 2). As Cassandra Cross, Molly Dragiewicz, and Kelly Richards have shown persuasively, romance fraud unequivocally equates to domestic violence, especially in relation to emotional control and manipulation, the common non-violent tactics

used by offenders to 'ensure compliance with ongoing demands for money' (1). Moreover, the focus on emotional abuse here is significant here, for it is only as recent as 2015 that the law on gendered violence in the UK was widened to recognise the role of control and coercion as forms of domestic abuse. 'Controlling behaviour', in this context, describes a range of acts 'designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour' (Home Office n.pag.). 'Coercive behaviour', meanwhile, describes an 'act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim' (Home Office n.pag.). To return to Jordan and Frame's texts, these neo-Victorian narratives of trauma not only reimagine the criminal violence of Dickens's backstory but re-present the events such that we bear witness to Compeyson's duplicity *and* after-witness to Havisham's trauma, a concept explored by Kohlke and Gutleben in their edited collection *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma* (2010). This is timely given that current statistics from the World Health Organization indicate that approximately 35% of women globally experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime (both inside and outside of marriage), while almost one-third of women will be physically abused at some point (World Health Organization n.pag.). However, while the portrayal of Miss Havisham's past seeks to 'bridge comprehension' between the timelines described in *Great Expectations*, here such insight is not offered by way of critique, feminist or otherwise (Kohlke and Gutleben 18). On the contrary, Jordan and Frame merely rework Dickens's tale of gendered and criminal violence in exploitative fashion, making Miss Havisham's trauma a 'light-hearted' spectacle for primetime entertainment (and, in the case of Frame's novel, one might suggest to capitalise on the appetite for all things Dickensian in the year of his bicentenary celebrations). A sense of misogyny as sensationalism is present in the spectacle being retold here, something picked up by one reviewer of *Dickensian* who eloquently remarked that:

> This is a lady who, in a single moment (one morning, at twenty to nine), is so psychologically injured that she dedicates both her own life and the lives of several young people to wreaking revenge on men, without a care for personal hygiene or whether bedraggled white lace remains on-trend. [W]e are slowly watching bad things happening to a young woman… . (Kelly 1)

Despite the fact that, as Kelly reminds us here, Miss Havisham – in Dickens's novel – lives in a disrupted and traumatised way of being, prequels devoted to her past eagerly invite the reader/viewer to participate in her destruction. In fact, 'we' – the reader colluding with the writer/author – are waiting for the moment whereby the Miss Havisham of Dickens's novel comes to life, which effectively means seeing her trauma and witnessing her becoming. As Catherine puts it in

Frame's novel, we, like her, are 'awaiting the death blow' (76). This has a pernicious edge given that, as Georges Letissier reminds us, Dickens's character was inspired by 'a series of reported cases of mentally disturbed, broken-hearted women' from London and Australia (31).[3]

While *Dickensian* nominally presents Havisham's tale within the 'traditionally masculine genre of detective fiction' – a whodunnit plot concerning the death of Jacob Marley, with Stephen Rea's Inspector Bucket assuming the lead role in solving the murder mystery – in actuality, the drama gravitates around Miss Havisham's plight (played by Tuppence Middleton) (Cuklanz and Moorti 303). Taking place over 20 episodes, the series commences in the Havisham household, with Mr Havisham's funeral, and concludes with Amelia's ominous wedding day in episode 20 (notably, Marley's murder is solved in episode 17). From the outset, *Dickensian* concentrates on the violence of the criminal conspiracy between Merriweather Compeyson (as he is called here) (played by Tom Weston-Jones) and Amelia's brother, Arthur (played by Joseph Quinn). Indeed, apart from Amelia's friendship with Honoria (soon to be Lady Dedlock – from Dickens's *Bleak House* [1853], played by Sophie Rundle), *Dickensian* offers no wider investment in Amelia's character development. Instead, she is an expendable prop around whom a tale of domestic and criminal violence unfolds.

In fact, as episode one indicates, Amelia is a linchpin for Jordan's shock-driven, soap opera tactics to portray patriarchal cruelty and romantic fraud. Although the episode begins with Mr Havisham's funeral, it very quickly descends into a tale of domestic violence. Arthur's insists that his father's will should be read that same day, but following the reading, in which he discovers that he is only receiving a 10% share in Havisham's brewery and Amelia is to inherit the rest of their father's estate, Arthur becomes violent. We see him assault Amelia, grabbing her arm and dragging her along the street, before snatching a whip from a parked carriage and physically threatening her: 'you're a spoilt little brat, spoilt for the want of a good beating. Well maybe it's time you had one!' (23:50). Jordan's focus on Arthur's bitterness leaves no doubt that, in Arthur's view, Amelia is to blame for the violence; she deserves 'a good beating' because she is 'spoilt' (23:50). In doing so, the show rightly portrays victim-blaming, the skewed, misogynist logic that suggests that women are 'asking for it' ('it' being violence – whether physical, emotional, or sexual). Arthur's bitter and self-interested behaviour denotes his repugnance, but his wrath is given particular emphasis when he whips the wall next to his sister, a moment which symbolises the threat of domestic violence that he now poses to her. We see Amelia flinch in fear. The moment is disrupted, however, by Mr Compeyson, who appears as a well-meaning passer-by keen to prevent further physical violence. By way of interjection, Compeyson punches Arthur, who falls to the floor in shock with a bloodied lip as his sister looks on in horror. Although, therefore, the show worryingly uses violence to temper violence, here Merriweather's actions serve as an added reminder that violence against women is not to be tolerated.

Yet, thanks to our knowledge of Compeyson from Dickens's novel, 'we' – the knowing viewer, 'collud[ing] with the writer' – are fully cognisant of the dubious nature of this apparently well-intentioned bystander (Heilmann and Llewellyn 15). Indeed, the subsequent scene between Arthur and Compeyson makes explicit the sense of collusion, as the exchange between the men reveals the former moment to have been a ruse, a premediated drama intended to scare and threaten Amelia, and ingratiate Merriweather in the guise of hero. We see Arthur in an alleyway, sat wiping the blood from his face as Merriweather approaches him. 'You didn't have to hit me quite so hard', he resentfully tells his co-conspirator; 'You told me to be convincing', retorts Compeyson, words that Tom Weston-Jones delivers with a rather sinister smile (28:03). In this way, 'we' – the viewer – are now privy to the men's criminal conspiracy.

Although forms of violence are undoubtedly present (and inherent) to Miss Havisham's tale, *Dickensian* narrates this with troubling effect. This particular scene serves as the second-to-last moment of episode one. With the sinister disclosure that the previous scene of domestic violence was a scam, the viewer is, therefore, encouraged to eagerly await the worse events to follow in episode two. In other words, criminality and gendered violence are transformed from problematic to exhilarating, and this sensationalism is intensified onscreen by Compeyson's ominous smile, which connotes a chilling delight in male power. The drama thus creates an ambivalence about whose 'side' we should be on. There is no retort for the violence that Amelia has just experienced; in fact, after Arthur's assault we merely see Merriweather take her home before the focus shifts back to the men. In other words, she is a dispensable subject to be objectified and we are participating in their agenda, thus offering little explicit critique of emotional and physical violence.

Episode two takes this dubious representation further. Here, Compeyson and Arthur openly indulge their misogyny as they elucidate their plan to destroy Amelia:

> COMPEYSON: You described your sister as head strong, wilful.
> ARTHUR: Yes.
> COMPEYSON: It's no doubt because she is accustomed to getting what she wants?
> ARTHUR: Father doted on her.
> COMPEYSON: Then it is high time that she learns a very valuable lesson: that not *all* men will do her bidding. … Leave the goose to the fox, Arthur. I shall deliver her once she's been plucked. (03:10)

Compeyson's use of the predator/prey motif dramatises the animalistic nature of the men's plan, thus providing a troubling (albeit unspecified) insight into the men's intended violence towards Amelia. As the dialogue makes clear, their violence is born from misogyny: in Arthur's case, it is petty sibling jealousy coupled with his emasculation at being passed over in his father's will (he is subservient to a woman), while Merriweather is affronted by Amelia's independence

and wants to steal her wealth. Understanding the rationale behind such brutality is, of course, as Dickens himself suggested in the words that opened this chapter, one way in which we might understand Miss Havisham better. However, as suggested, this is not the point of these particular prequels. To the contrary, as Compeyson's motif makes abundantly clear, they are about watching a male 'predator' stalk a female 'prey' as light-hearted entertainment.

Indeed, in the same scene just moments later, *Dickensian* underlines this focus on patriarchy and masculine domination when Compeyson feigns the need to 'make amends' for his former 'eagerness to protect' Amelia by way of reconciling the siblings, something he offers 'In memory of her late father and the true spirit of Christmas' (03:59). Amelia, however, rejects Compeyson's interjection:

> Mr Compeyson. Much as I applaud your good intentions, what on earth could I or anyone else have said or done to give you the impression that I would ask a total stranger to involve himself in my family business? Arthur and I will no doubt resolve our differences as we have always done and without the need for a mediary. Good day and merry Christmas. (18:03)

Amelia's refusal of help is received by Compeyson first as a shock and then as a challenge, something signalled again by his sinister smile as he stands outside of Satis House, having left at her request. In the scene that follows, Compeyson laughs as he relays to Arthur how his sister 'threw me out' (27:36). Arthur is unclear, though, why this should be funny, to which Compeyson explains, 'Because my dear Havisham, it means the chase is on and I'll wager not an easy one at that. So in the well-honoured tradition of "to the victor the spoils", I intend to take her for everything' (27:51). Compeyson's positioning of Amelia as a lucrative target signals his villainy here, something also gestured to by Arthur's slight shock at the ease with which his conspirator has quickly upped the stakes of their plan. However, not only is Arthur's apparent shock self-centred (he is not sufficiently motivated to protest, for instance), but the positioning of the men's exchange as *the* point of the scene (as well as the episode's final moment overall) effectively overlooks how Jordan constitutes Compeyson's abuse as an overt backlash for her refusal of male assistance and female self-assertion. By focusing on the prowess of Compeyson's violent masculinity and sensationalising the spectacle of the 'chase', *Dickensian* fails to register that Amelia is, unbeknownst to her, being punished for resisting male power. Such imagery is all the more disturbing given that, in 2009, a UK government survey on public attitudes to domestic violence reported that those who refused passivity in abusive exchanges (either marital or non-marital) were seen as 'less warm, and so more blameworthy' for any violence that ensued (Banyard 124). In effect, the critique of victim-blaming in episode one is subverted by episode two.

Worryingly, to underline the sensationalism of abuse here, it is significant that Jordan adds sexual exploitation to Compeyson's list of misdemeanours. Such is Amelia's optimism towards her now-forthcoming marital union with Merriweather that she consents to sex. Her choice undoubtedly speaks to 21st-century sexual politics, whereby women's choice to engage in consensual sexual encounters beyond marital confines is welcomed in Western cultures. In the show, however, Jordan gives Amelia's sexual choice a decidedly pernicious twist in a number of ways, not least because the viewer witnesses the encounter through Arthur's voyeuristic gaze. In episode 17, we follow his search for Amelia at Satis House, only for him to find Compeyson in flagrante with Amelia, something Arthur watches momentarily. The exploitative nature of this moment is underlined in two ways. First, the scene explicitly presents the intimate activity against the backdrop of further manipulation and abuse; it is form of reconciliation after Amelia had challenged Merriweather for kissing another woman (his wife), whom Compeyson subsequently passes off as his sister. In other words, sex, here, derives from lies and is purely exploitative so as not to threaten the men's wider, fraudulent plan. Second – and arguably more troublingly – we see Merriweather's acknowledge Arthur's voyeuristic presence by both smiling and closing the door on him. The smile, again, is not only a sinister signification of sexual exploitation[4] but demonstrates visually Heilmann and Llewellyn's point that, sometimes, neo-Victorian texts fetishise 'the secret and forbidden' (107). While the door closure may appear, on one level, to refuse the viewer access to further scenes of sexual intimacy and therefore reject exploitation, it functions, in fact, to prevent Arthur from interjecting and disrupting Compeyson's sexual seduction. Indeed, the way in which the door's closure fades the screen to black is indicative of the way in which this Dickensian prequel moves suggestively, on an imaginative level, to darker and more taboo spaces.

The cruelty of optimism

While *Dickensian* dramatises – rather than critiques – physical and sexual violence to women, Frame's novel replicates the same strategies, but does so from a different perspective, namely, by recreating the tale of emotional abuse. Indeed, through a first-person narrative, Frame's rewrites Compeyson's duplicitous courtship of Catherine. To return to the reader's knowing collusion with Dickens's world, the effect of Frame's textual approach reconfigures how the reader experiences Compeyson's duplicity, allowing us to access first-hand the way that romance fraud functions a form of emotional violence. On an analytical level, Lauren Berlant's theoretical conception of 'cruel optimism' offers a valuable mechanism to render visible the narrative politics of Frame's text as representative of emotional violence (1).

In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Berlant considers the nature of desire and how individual attachments of any kind lead to an investment in what she calls

'the good life', in other words fulfilment and happiness (27). Berlant explains that 'all attachments are optimistic' because any form of desire, whether is it attached to 'an improved way of being', 'a political project', or romantic attraction, is inherently entwined with 'promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us' (23). For Berlant, such 'optimistic relations' are not inherently cruel, but they 'become cruel when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially', thus exposing the desire to be an 'impossible sheer fantasy' (1, 94). At that point, then, optimism becomes cruel.

Frame's portrayal of Catherine's relationship with Compeyson, particularly her dreams for their future life together and her investments in her fiancé coupled with her later knowledge of his duplicity, reflects Berlant's conception of 'cruel optimism'. Indeed, in *Havisham*, Catherine's extended fantasies of 'the good life' (to borrow Berlant's words) are *the* basis against which her subsequent trauma unfolds (94), but it is also a cruel optimism because the reader is privy to the romance fraud Catherine is a victim of; we know her relationship is toxic. To underline Catherine's trauma, however, early on Frame amplifies the expression of Catherine's optimism, most of which centre, of course, on the varied passages recounting Compeyson's seduction. In one scene, for example, Catherine relays her intimate feelings for Compeyson to her maidservant and confidante, Sally. Catherine's disclosure renders her emotionally vulnerable, and Frame emphasises how her feelings are physically and emotionally consuming:

> I told Sally things, as soon as they had stumbled out of me, I realised I shouldn't have said.
> (*Ah! how sweet it is to love*)
> About the jolts of excitement my body received from him; about waking up thinking of him.
> (*Ah! how gay is young desire*)
> About dressing to please him, first and foremost. About finding him waiting for me in my dreams …
> (*And what pleasing pain we prove,/When first we feel a lover's fire*)
> (*Pains of love are sweeter far, Than all other pleasures are*)
> … 'my' Charles Compeyson (115–16)

Here Frame underlines Catherine's passionate disclosure by juxtaposing her words with selected lines from John Dryden's epic love poem 'Ah, How Sweet It Is to Love!', a short poem that celebrates the power of romance and its all-consuming nature. The inclusion of Dryden's words animates Catherine's emotions, thus intensifying her disclosure. They indicate that Catherine's feelings are overwhelming; she desires Compeyson both physically ('the jolts of excitement my body received from him') and emotionally ('waiting for me in my

dreams') (115–16). But, at the same time, it is important that these are *select* lines from Dryden's poem, and, while his wider piece is a salutation of young love, it is also a commentary on love in relation to tragedy, suffering, age, and death, which, he suggests, is easier than heartbreak.

As such, when *Havisham* elucidates the knowing collusion between the author and the reader of which Heilmann and Llewellyn speak, the words are a cruel optimism; we read between the lines of these words and supply the meta-commentary on Catherine's feelings. And her words, of course, are compromised; not only do 'we' know that her investment in Compeyson is misplaced, but so too we recognise that her hopes are a mere fantasy. As such, Catherine's optimism is doubly cruel. The transformation of such knowledge through author/reader collusion draws attention to the way in which emotional violence underlines the novel, and this becomes (more) apparent a few pages later when Catherine conveys to Sally the vivacity of Compeyson's approach:

> The things he knew about me. Trivial, unimportant things. It seemed to me those must be the most difficult fact of all to discover. That I preferred fish to meat, and grayling to mackerel, and sole to grayling. That I slept with my window slightly ajar, and never on two pillows. That I wore away the left inside of my right heel before any other part of either shoe. That I carried a sachet of orange blossom in my portmanteau. That I wrote letters wearing a clip-on cotton frill over my cuff. That I gargled with salt water three – and always three – times a day. And let my hair down and brush it, with fifty strokes – or as near as – every night before bed. That my favourite poet used to be Gray, but now it was Cowper. (Frame 120–21)

Catherine, of course, believes that Charles's intimate knowledge of her is that of a lover at pains to learn the details of their partner's life. Despite enquiring 'how he knew what he did', Compeyson misdirects Catherine interests and, as a result, she is 'bemused', rather than 'alarmed' by his knowledge of intimate details that she herself recognises he should not know (Frame 121). She is inquisitive about the unexplained and recognises that something is remiss, but, nonetheless, she configures the mystery as romantic, seeing it optimistically as evidence that 'his kindred soul' was 'exactly in sympathy – in imagination in conjunction – with my own' (Frame 121). Of course, 'we', the knowing reader, recognise the more dubious nature of events here and, although at this point in the text 'we' are not privy to Compeyson's manipulation, we know how the fated romance will unfold. Later, the sense of collusion is realised narratively, with Catherine's later discovery that Sally was, in fact, disclosing information to Compeyson, who is her husband, supplying him with such intimate details about her mistress so as to enable the deception. As such, Catherine's words here are a reminder that this is a tale of romance fraud, and of course Catherine

comes to fully realise these instances of optimism as cruel long after she learns of Compeyson's duplicity.

Berlant also conceptualises optimism as cruel when one's desire is revealed as – or exposed to be – toxic (for any reason). In *Havisham*, Frame underlines the toxic nature of Catherine's former optimism by situating it in relation to victim-blaming: self-blame, to be more specific. Indeed, throughout her narrative, Catherine occasionally provides a self-blaming metacommentary on her retrospective narrative and, very often, these relate to moments of physical and sexual intimacy. Unlike *Dickensian*, *Havisham* does not include scenes of penetrative intercourse between the pair. However, not only does Frame include an extended scene where Catherine masturbates in relation to fantasies of Compeyson, but Catherine later lambasts herself for a variety of intimate moments that, she remembers, 'he set up':

> whenever we accidentally touched at the gate-legged tea table or in the narrow doorway – fingers, back of the hand, wrist – it was like contact with sulphur. I felt that my skin was scorched for a minute or two afterwards. …
>
> It was cruelty: I should have seen it was that. But I was the very last person who would have.
>
> He had me on a chain. No: on a silken halter. (125)

Catherine's description exemplifies Berlant's conception of 'cruel optimism', as her own use of the word 'cruelty' indicates. As her words imply, she likens herself to horse or other animal who was being trained (or 'broken in', to borrow the appropriate parlance), and her use of the phrase 'silken halter' recognises the eroticism and sexualised nature of Compeyson's 'training' for corrupt means. Likewise, her reference to 'sulphur' holds a self-blaming connotation through invocation of the Bible; 'fire and brimstone' is an archaic term for sulphur and the phrase is used in Biblical imagery to describe divine punishment. As such, Frame implicitly draws attention to Catherine's sense of eternal damnation. Catherine's recrimination and self-blame poignantly relay the way in which Frame's retrospective, first-person narrative is a reminder of the very real effects of emotional violence. Yet, Frame's use of the word 'should' here is disingenuous and cliched, since it erroneously implies that the romance fraud 'should' have been prevented, something we, the omniscient reader (alongside the knowing author) recognise to be impossible.

That day

Naturally, *Dickensian* and *Havisham* share the same point of crescendo: Miss Havisham's wedding day. Here, not only do both texts quite literally depict the cruelty of Catherine/Amelia's optimism, but participate eagerly in the affective destruction of this young, independent woman. After all, this is the 'death blow'

that 'we' have been waiting for and which the texts have been knowingly building towards (Frame 76). Miss Havisham's neo-Victorian afterlives, it seems, sit counter to reworkings of other Dickensian women, for, as Pete Orford demonstrates in Chapter 5's discussion of reworkings of Dickens's unfinished text, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), Rosa Bud's 'ending' is demarcated by plural possibilities and choice.

Frame's novel unfolds the climax through a moment-by-moment breakdown of the wedding day itself that begins with the poignancy of Catherine's excitement: 'I woke early, and it was the first thought in my head. I marry this morning. … This would be the last time I took my rest like this, as a single woman' (207). 'We' join Catherine as she dresses and is beautified for her joyous day, including her lengthy descriptions of the maids who 'dress her hair' and 'powdered my body from head to foot', and soften and prepare her skin with make-up, before finally, putting on her dress – *the* dress she will never get out of once it is on (Frame 207). In effect, while Catherine is preparing to 'become' the Miss Havisham of Dickens's novel, she is also, simultaneously, transforming into what criminological and feminist discourse on domestic violence describes as 'the ideal victim', a troubling and dominant media misconception of what female victims of violence 'look like': young, pretty (for which read 'feminised'), and innocent (for which read 'childlike'), all of which reify troubling gender stereotypes of women as vulnerable (Custers and Van de Bulck 98–9). Soon after dressing, though, the dreaded letter from Compeyson announcing the end of their relationship arrives. Frame intersperses a traumatic internal monologue with extracts from the letter:

> I had read only the first few words when I felt my heart leap up into my throat. I couldn't breathe.
>
> 'I cannot but expect that the contents of this Letter must greatly aggrieve you …'
>
> No.
>
> No, no. (209)

The gentle repetition of 'no' here relays Catherine's emotional distress (209). However, Frame takes the expression of Catherine's suffering further, relaying in gruesome detail the physical manifestation of her trauma. As she reads the letter, she feels 'wetness on both legs, a stream of hot liquid starting to soak my stockings' because she 'couldn't control myself; a rivulet of piss flowed out of me' (209). Catherine's cries, we are told, 'brought the others to my room', where Catherine is on the floor, lying 'in my own urine', and 'howling' (210). The maidservants attempt to support Catherine, with one woman informing her that 'it would be all right', but these words – and Catherine's shock – soon drive home the reality of her situation. She lashes out, striking the maid, and flails at her staff, screaming on the floor (210). This moment of violence marks her symbolic death, as she puts it, 'All I knew, the only thing, was this: I had reached

the end of the life I'd had. It was lost to me now' (210). Catherine becomes a 'beast in its lair', her transformation from an expectant, beautiful bride to a urine-covered, violent woman on the floor also demarcates her transition from 'ideal victim' to the macabre figure of Dickens's novel (Frame 210; Custers and Van de Bulck 98).

The events of the wedding day take place approximately two-thirds of the way through Frame's text, thus the remainder of the novel is a detailed insight into the traumatic effects following *that* day. In other words, Frame not only portrays Catherine's trauma but then also indulges her transformation into the Miss Havisham of Dickens's novel, something he relays by interspersing the remaining narrative with extracts from the Victorian text.

Dickensian presents much the same, but here Amelia's downfall is more visually restrained and confined to the final episode of the series. Like Frame's novel, Jordan presents Amelia's wedding preparations, with Amelia taking particular happiness in her friend Honoria arriving in time to participate in her bridal preparations. Unlike Frame's text and Dickens's novel, though, Jordan slightly rewrites the unveiling of Compeyson's deceit. Here, much centres on Arthur's reparation, his late change of heart about the duo's plan. But, while his actions may appear altruistic, he is entirely self-motivated: 'I intend to go to Satis House and sob at her feet' (17:30). Moreover, the change of heart is also effected with violence; Arthur employs Bill Sikes (from *Oliver Twist*) as his 'muscle', and Sikes, of course, happily dispenses violence in exchange for payment. Arthur gives Compeyson the option of imprisonment or writing a confession for Miss Havisham and delivering it in person (for which he can depart afterwards with cash from shares in the Havisham brewery). Thus, despite some protest about his choices, he opts for the latter. Such scenes are intercut, of course, with Amelia's wedding preparations.

The disclosure of romance fraud thus becomes a scene in which three men (Arthur, Compeyson, and Mr Jaggers, the family lawyer) traumatise Amelia with the knowledge that they are doing the 'right' thing. But this approach also visualises Amelia's humiliation; 'we', like the men, must bear witness to her trauma. Crying through her words, Amelia recognises quickly that she has been used sexually as well as emotionally for financial gain, and, onscreen, Compeyson supplements the letter with a verbal confession. Amelia gives him a choice: if he is truly sorry, he can leave Satis House without the money. But Compeyson is not truly sorry. Amelia expresses her pain with reference to the female body, drawing on language associated with sexual violence to convey her sense of shame:

> You have taken all the secret things about me and tainted them. You have made them dirty and the joy of them has turned to shame. You made me trust you, made me feel safe in your arms, as if nothing bad could happen to me again, and I gave myself to you. I looked on you as my life, and you looked on me as prey. (27:03)

Quite bizarrely, however, Jordan attempts to transform Compeyson's villainy. In a rather cliched form, Compeyson tells Amelia that, despite his former falsehoods, he now loves her and wishes to be given a chance to repair his wrongdoings. In effect, Jordan's Compeyson transforms from villain to victim; as he stands before Amelia, bloodied and exposed, his broken heart becomes as much the moral centre of *Dickensian*'s final moments as Amelia's. Of course, though, because the now-conman with a heart of gold cannot atone for his sins, Amelia thus tries to control her humiliation by asking him to leave: 'I want you to go, so that I can sit here amidst my folly, surrounding by my stupidity for all the world to see' (28:38). These words are a stoic moment of agency, but it is also a knowing meta-moment of how Dickens constructed Miss Havisham as a spectacle in her wedding dress and a gesture to how she remains in popular culture. This moment of trauma (and self-blame) is what the viewer has eagerly anticipated, and it is apt, therefore, that it is the drama's emotional climax (but not before Compeyson picks up the bag and departs with the money). The final scene shows Amelia refusing to change from her dress, opting to wear it instead as a form of self-punishment. In other words, Miss Havisham's wedding dress becomes not only a physical manifestation of her trauma, but in *Dickensian*, a marker of *her* shame. Amelia's choice to wear it forever more denotes perpetual self-punishment, but Compeyson still leaves with the cash.

• • •

To conclude, both *Dickensian* and *Havisham* position themselves as 'tributes', as Frames calls it, 'to one of Dickens's most celebrated and iconic characters' (front cover). Yet, in positioning themselves in relation to Dickens's text, such prequels open their representation to ideological scrutiny and critical appraisal. As I have shown in the course of this chapter, these particular Dickensian prequels rely on violence towards women coupled with a focus on women's shame as methods for entertainment. Clearly, with a story like Miss Havisham's, suffering and torment are part and parcel of the Dickensian plotline. But, as these stories give flesh to a young woman's tale *before* her transformation into the gothic, macabre spinster that Dickens presents, the gender and sexual politics at play here cannot be overlooked. Berlant suggests that very often the cruelty of optimism lies in an individual's recognition of the attachment to a 'problematic object in advance of its loss' (94). In other words, it is heightened by foresight, but in the case of Miss Havisham the foresight belongs to the author and reader/viewer, rather than Catherine or Amelia; 'we' have access to the misogyny and duplicity that Miss Havisham does not and 'we', therefore, partake in her destruction. With this in mind, these neo-Victorian prequels to *Great Expectations* (unlike Duffy's, for instance) articulate a hostile and troubling account of how to destroy a woman. The reader/viewer might have, 'some compassion' and a 'better understanding of me', as Miss Havisham tells Pip in Dickens's novel, but, really, these texts have merely traded on violence against women as entertainment (*GE* 366).

Endnotes

[1] See, for example, Miriam Margolyes, 'Introduction', *Dickens' Women*. Edited by Miriam Margolyes and Sonia Fraser. Hesperus Press Ltd, 2011, pp. 1–15. Likewise, in *Dickens and Women* (1983), Michael Slater divided Dickens's women into three archetypes, none of which are particularly flattering: the unattainable object, the pre-pubescent idealised girl-woman, and the grotesque, and in *Charles Dickens and the Image of Woman* (1993), David Holbrook finds a persistent association of women with death, specifically murder, across Dickens's *oeuvre*. Elsewhere, in *Dickens, Women and Language* (1992), Patricia Ingham argued for a more historically informed and less hostile assessment of his representation of women and, building on this, in *Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women* (2008), Jenny Hartley illustrated Dickens's engagement with fallen women in the 19th century, arguing that whatever his motives he was nonetheless keen to help women in need of support.

[2] Other neo-Victorian texts that have recreated Miss Havisham included Peter Ackroyd's *English Music* (1993) and Jasper Fforde's *Lost in A Good Book* (2002).

[3] Letissier only reflects in passing that numerous real-life figures are said to have inspired Dickens's character. He notes both John Ryan's work on Eliza Emily Donnithorne, a young Australian woman who was also abandoned at the alter in 1856, and who died something of a recluse in 1886, and Martin Meisel's speculative piece on the evolution of Miss Havisham in Dickens's writing. See John Ryan's 'Eliza Emily Donnithorne', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/donnithorne-eliza-emily-3426 and 'A Possible Australian Source for Miss Havisham', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol 1, no. 2, 1963, pp 134–6, and Martin Meisel, 'Miss Havisham Bought to Book', *PMLA*, vol. 81, no. 3, 1966, pp. 278–85.

[4] Of course, reinstated in a 19th-century context, this moment would also mark Miss Havisham as an unrespectable – if not fallen – woman.

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CHAPTER 5

The Unfinished Picture: The Mystery of Rosa Bud

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Rosa Bud is one of Dickens's least understood heroines, and open to the widest range of interpretation and discussion. Of course, a great deal of this is owed to the incompletion of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), and with it the uncertainty over Rosa's character arc and fate. There have been hundreds of theories presented since Dickens's death, which can be divided into two distinct categories of completions and solutions. A completion is a fully fleshed-out second half to Dickens's tale, while a solution is instead a discussion around Dickens's text. It is not necessarily the case that a completion is longer than a solution, as quite often writers have produced entire books discussing their theory for the end of *Drood* with detailed references to what they consider to be evidence. The key distinction is the range of focus: a completion has to take the entire narrative and cast of Dickens's book under consideration, while a solution can cherry-pick those aspects of the story deemed to be of most interest. It is perhaps also worth noting that solutions far outnumber completions.

Thus, while the business of trying to solve *Drood* is a popular one, it is primarily defined by the big questions: is Edwin dead or alive, who killed him, and who is Dick Datchery? Those proffering their solutions pay little attention to Rosa beyond a cursory mention of her husband-to-be. Even in completions,

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where authors *have* to account for Rosa's actions in the second half of their novel, it is clear their interest still lies more in the fate of Edwin and the identity of Datchery. Often completionists will embed studious layers of justification building up to the revelation of whether Edwin is dead or alive, but in the same works Rosa's fate is resolved with less attempt to prove its validity. In their conscious efforts to address the 'bigger' issues, completionists will in the process offer more casual judgements on other characters and plotlines. But even this is preferable to an absence of discussion, such as can often be seen in solutions. When Rosa does get a mention in these it is usually no more than a cursory consideration of who she will marry. Rosa has been slighted, to be sure. However, this is not a deliberately malicious act but rather an indication that, while Droodists recognise a controversy over Edwin's character arc, they do not see Rosa's fate as being nearly so debatable. Her story is not considered to be a mystery, yet in truth the variation in that fate in the hands of different authors tells us a great deal about their presumptions and the manner in which our assumed path for a Dickens heroine can change over the decades.

The importance of this lies in the scorn which is frequently, and unfairly, poured on Rosa for being either annoying or boring. Even Edmund Wilson, in his groundbreaking reappraisal of *Drood*, wrote derogatively that 'the characters that are healthy, bright and good – Rosa Bud, with her silly name, for example – seem almost as two-dimensional as colo[u]red paper dolls' (101). This argument will seek to show Wilson's mistake in dismissing Rosa as a paper doll, and argue that such an interpretation comes from only having the first half of the book and the importance we place upon the end of a story in determining the full depiction of a character. I shall begin by re-evaluating Rosa as she appears in Dickens's text, arguing for the potential blossoming of her character, before then looking at how others have proposed that development might take place. While most Droodists have tended to depict Rosa in the story's conclusion in a relatively conventional way, others have opted for a deliberately provocative reinterpretation of the character. This in turn is linked to the debate over whether any end to *Drood* should attempt to honour the intentions of Dickens, or instead divert from the original author altogether and move the story forward into new territory. As will be seen, Rosa's story, lurking on the fringe of Edwin's mystery, offers a far more intriguing glimpse into the myriad of possibilities awaiting the residents of Cloisterham.

'Comically conscious of itself': Dickens's ambiguous heroine

Even without the infinite potential for the character that comes from the unconfirmed ending, the Rosa that Dickens presents shows clear signs of a character ready to evolve. Wilson's dismissive interpretation of the character is easily explained by the early appearances of Rosa in which she is apparently very much a spoiled pet. But, even in her debut, Dickens warns us that there

is more to the character than we are being told. We are introduced to Rosa not directly, but via her portrait. In Chapter 2 of *Drood*, Dickens describes a picture hanging on the wall of Jasper's room:

> the unfinished picture of a blooming schoolgirl hanging over the chimneypiece, her flowing brown hair tied with a blue riband, and her beauty remarkable for a quite childish, almost babyish, touch of saucy discontent, comically conscious of itself. (There is not the least artistic merit in this picture, which is a mere daub; but it is clear that the painter has made it humorously – one might almost say, revengefully – like the original.) (14)

This picture is the perfect summary of Rosa's character. The description of Rosa as childish, saucy, and beautiful certainly seems to play into the dismissive reaction of Wilson and others. But Dickens also suggest her beauty to be 'comically conscious of itself', which hints at a deeper level of character behind the girlish façade. The true keynote of the description is 'unfinished'. It is unintentionally prophetic, of course, given the unfinished state of the book, but more immediately shows Dickens's depiction of Rosa at the start of the novel – a pettish, spoiled, not yet fully matured, character that is due to develop but is not finished yet.

Lynette Felber notes how portraits in Victorian literature provide 'a verbal representation of physical appearance that most conspicuously functions to establish character', and that seems to be the case here, with one important proviso: it is a bad picture of Rosa, lacking 'the least artistic merit' (471). The relationship between the physical appearance of Rosa and her character is complicated in this instance because the woman being described is not an accurate depiction of Rosa but Edwin's ill-attempted portrait of her, both humorous and revengeful. What we are therefore seeing, and the character we are having established, is as much Edwin's view of her as the true depiction. This is exacerbated by the picture's location hanging on Jasper's wall, which is explained as a sign of his affection for the artist, but of course recognised by the reader as part of Jasper's desire to possess the subject. Dickens's interpolation of Rosa's portrait into what is ultimately a scene between Jasper and Edwin shows both how she hovers over their relationship but also how she in turn is constantly defined and objectified by the two men. The viewers become as important, and under as much scrutiny, as the picture. In her consideration of portraiture in Victorian literature, Felber dwells on *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), and the manner in which her portrait is viewed by George Talboys and Robert Audley, suggesting that 'The pleasure each individual man receives is different – and completes the portrait differently – but the juxtaposition of the two reactions illustrates the dual effect of the fetish' (474). Dickens's novel inadvertently presents the same distinction of two observers with two contrasting responses to the same picture. Edwin sees merely his own artistry, his little joke at Rosa's expense, with

little thought for her, while Jasper meanwhile is condemned to only see Rosa via Edwin, to have her there in his sight, but through the distorted lens of his spoiled nephew.

That this picture which they look upon should be unfinished speaks volumes. It shows Edwin's lack of care and devotion that he cannot be bothered to complete the portrait. It also shows Jasper's desperation that he would display even a poorly sketched, incomplete picture of his love, given that it is all he can hope to ever have. Finally, it shows in both instances an incomplete understanding from either man of Rosa, that the idol they both gaze and muse upon is not the real thing, nor even a comprehensive account of her; It not only suggests Rosa is incomplete but moreover that there does not, at this early stage, exist a man who truly and completely knows her; that the depiction of her as childish and saucy is not so much a true reflection of her character but one defined by the gaze and opinions of others.

Even when Rosa does finally appear in person in the next chapter, Dickens further delays the moment by having her enter the room to Edwin 'as a charming little apparition, with its face concealed by a little silk apron thrown over its head' (26). That Dickens should even at this stage refer to Rosa as 'it' further identifies both her ambiguity and Edwin's failure to understand her as he sees this vision with little comprehension as to its gender. This can be further seen as an early indication of Edwin's own naivety and the lack of sexual frisson in their relationship that he sees the girl he is going to marry as this androgynous being. The headless apparition complements the bodiless head previously portrayed in Edwin's painting; Rosa is once again incomplete. The artfulness of Dickens's entrance for his heroine is that in drawing our attention to the concealment of her head, we revert to the earlier depiction of her face as our image of Rosa, and indeed Dickens does not correct it, as he never offers a direct description of Rosa herself. But, whereas in the previous scene the incompletion of Rosa's description was down to the inattention of Edwin, now the concealment is made of her own choosing. She throws her apron over her head deliberately in protest at the 'absurd' situation of her fellow schoolgirls being all in 'such a state of flutter' to gawp at her with her fiancé (25–6). Cloisterham's very name hints at the claustrophobic, enclosed nature of living in such a town, and Rosa is the star attraction, living in a goldfish bowl in which many stop to admire her. The apron is her early attempt to confound and deny the expectations of those who gaze upon her, to defy description and classification.

It is not only Rosa's appearance that proves to be so teasingly ambiguous. Her very name has attracted a variety of interpretation which in itself stands as testament to how differently Rosa has been understood by readers. Matthew McGuire suggests it is 'a metaphoric synonym of rosebud and the fragility it implies [of] the blushing English Rose' (61). The same idea is also voiced by Patricia Ingham, who points to several of Dickens's female characters with Rose for a name, and contextualises this within a pattern for his finding names from 'images … frequently drawn from the natural world' (20). She argues that

'[w]omen are concealed beneath generic flowers, conventionally sparkling water, hazily unspecific blossom. Or they take on the role of household pets' (21). This is Ingham's explanation for Edwin's nickname for her, which only he uses, of Pussy. To a modern reader it is hard to read this without a titter or two, and Natalie McKnight writes convincingly that this is entirely foreseen by Dickens. Far from being a corruption of an innocent name by later readers, McKnight argues that the sexual connotation of the name was well known in Dickens's time, and the idea that it was innocent reveals 'a tone-deafness to the language [which] also reflects the persistence of the stereotype about Victorian prudery' (58). She also notes that 'Rosa's real name, "Rosa Bud," is also a longstanding term and image for female genitalia' (55). Brenda Ayres had already noted what she felt to be the 'blatant' insinuations of Rosa's name, arguing that it 'immediately signals that the text will not be metaphorically obscure or complex in her gender description' (81). To her, the name 'Rose Bud' is itself descriptive of someone ready to be plucked and deflowered.

This sexual side of Rosa lies not only in her name but also in her actions. After those early descriptions, tantalisingly incomplete in their accounts, Dickens describes Rosa and Edwin upon a walk together,

> off to the Lumps-of-Delights shop, where Rosa makes her purchase, and, after offering some to him which he rather indignantly declines), begins to partake of it with great zest: previously taking off and rolling up a pair of little pink gloves, like rose-leaves, and occasionally putting her little pink fingers to her rosy lips, to cleanse them from the Dust of Delight that comes of the Lumps. (30)

Ingham's *Dickens, Women and Language* (24–5) notes how 19th-century studies of physiognomy, such as Alexander Walker's 1834 work *Physiognomy Founded on Physiology*, identified the nose and mouth as animal organs, as opposed to the more intellectual organs such as eyes and ears, betraying our more basic desires. It is not without reason then to consider this hedonistic culinary moment to have sexual overtones as Rosa gives in to her sweet cravings. It also serves to show how Rosa is not the perfect Dickensian domestic heroine. As Ingham argues, 'the preparation of food is symbolic of the woman's essential abilities' (29). Whereas, for example, Mrs Cratchit's laboured creation of a Christmas feast confirms her perfection as a woman, Rosa is not preparing food but greedily and selfishly consuming junk food instead. In all of this she shows herself to be the antithesis of the good housewife.

The changing point in Rosa's character occurs in her breaking of the engagement with Edwin. This is an engagement arranged for them since children by their well-wishing fathers, now dead, that has been a chain around them, one more example of an adult dictating to Rosa. The moment she speaks the truth – and it is Rosa who speaks first – they immediately become less guarded, less petty, and better people for being open with one another:

> This pure young feeling, this gentle and forbearing feeling of each towards the other, brought with it its reward in a softening light that seemed to shine on their position. The relations between them did not look wilful, or capricious, or a failure, in such a light; they became elated into something more self-denying, honourable, affectionate, and true. (147)

The chapter's title of 'both at their best' is prescriptive in its congratulatory tone of the characters realising their potential to be better people, apart. The stage is set for Rosa to deviate from the plans laid down for her by the residents of Cloisterham. No longer defined by their expectations, she becomes immediately more 'honourably, affectionate, and true' rather than 'saucy' and 'childish' as when she was first introduced to the reader via her portrait. Ayres argues that Rosa 'courageously avoids a marriage to Drood that might follow the same disastrous course as Dora Copperfield's' (82) and sees it as a necessary step towards maturity. 'By not acting as a pet or a plaything', Ayres predicts that Rosa 'eventually will marry a young man and not a father type who will treat her like a toy' (82). Michael Slater agrees that the 'clear suggestion' is 'the reader will eventually see Rosa, inspired by love, rising above … her own frivolity' (287). But, of course, we never have that marriage confirmed, as the story finishes halfway through, at which point others stepped in to correct the tale. As readers we leave Rosa in London, lodging with Miss Twinkleton in rooms belonging to the humorous but underused Billickin, dreaming of Tartar while mourning Edwin, and always fearing the appearance of Jasper. There are several characters who hold an interest in Rosa, but we are left ignorant of her desires. The earlier parting of Edwin and Rosa is a moment of great potentiality, but ultimately one without fruition. The death of Dickens has left Rosa without the culmination of her journey. She may no longer be a pet or plaything, but it remains to be seen whether she will marry a young man and how he will treat her. At this point, it has been left to the Droodists to provide Rosa a conclusion, with varying degrees of success.

Budding romance: finding a man for Rosa

Dickens's intentions were in fact made public in 1874 when Forster published the third and final volume of his biography of Dickens. In it he summarises his friend's plans for his final novel – Edwin is dead, Jasper did it, and 'Rosa was to marry Tartar, and Crisparkle the sister of Landless' (426). While not all were convinced by Forster's assertion of Edwin's death, there was relatively more consensus in terms of Rosa's fate. While academics argued in articles, what completions did appear after the 1870s nearly all followed Forster – W.E. Crisp (1914), Edwin Harris (1932), Charles Forsyte (1980), and Leon Garfield (1980) all marry Rosa off to Tartar. It is astounding that, at the same time Forster was

being so roundly attacked for his supposedly false account, the perceived minor details of it were nonetheless being accepted. It shows to what extent Rosa's fate was of little consequence in many Droodists' eyes compared to that of the three men, Drood, Jasper, and Datchery. In presenting her in line with Forster's comments, the popular perception of Rosa switched from the foolish girl who changes her mind, to a young woman maturing and moving on from a platonic engagement to Edwin towards a sexual and deeper attraction to Tartar. It is an idea hinted at in Dickens's scene of Miss Twinkleton reading nautical tales aloud, of which Rosa takes opportunity to indulge in sailor-based fantasies:

> As a compensation against their romance, Miss Twinkleton, reading aloud, made the most of all latitudes and longitudes, bearings, winds, currents, offsets, and other statistics (which she felt to be none the less improving because they expressed nothing whatever to her); while Rosa, listening intently, made the most of what was nearest to her heart… . (254)

But Tartar did not always get the girl. In the case of screen adaptations, he never even showed up. The simple process of adapting the text for performance meant the familiar act of cutting characters; Tartar, however much he may have been embraced in written solutions as the man for Rosa, nonetheless is only a bit part in the fragment we have from Dickens, and therefore one of the easiest to cut. It is a question of ratio: Tartar appears for the first time in the fifth monthly number of *Drood*. Had the book been finished he would thus have been present for seven out of 12 numbers (over half the book), whereas in its unfinished state he appears in only two out of six numbers (merely a third). However much we can argue for his potential importance, from the perspective of scriptwriters adapting the text in front of them, Tartar is a minor character. The story has been adapted for screen eight times: on film in 1911, 1912, 1914, 1935, and 1993, and for television in 1952, 1960, and 2012. The UK television series of 1960 for ITV is the only adaptation to include Tartar. In the other adaptations the heroic vacuum left by Tartar's absence demands another man to step forward and fill the void, and of the possible contenders it is Neville who is the popular choice to step forward and assume the romantic lead.

In MGM's film of 1935, Neville is not only Rosa's dream man but the leading hero of the film, disguising himself as Datchery to clear his own name. In Mayfair Entertainment's 1990 film Crisparkle does much of the heroics, but Neville still steps in at the end as a romantic foil for Rosa. What proves dissatisfying in this interpretation is the impact it has on Rosa's character and her motivations during the breaking of the engagement with Edwin. She meets Neville *before* breaking the engagement with Edwin, whereas Tartar is unknown to her until afterwards. Thus, if she loves Tartar, then her break with Edwin is an entirely mature decision based on what is best for Rosa herself. But, if she is in love with Neville, the break becomes informed not by her internal growth as a character

but by the external impulse of a new man who has stolen her affections. Falling in love with Neville robs Rosa of the degree of agency and self-awareness which Dickens points towards in her parting from Edwin. It is the sailor who stands as the choice for a more mature Rosa, a young woman making her own decisions in the world rather than being dictated by giddy, changeable affections for men. Though Slater talks of a 'paucity of examples of a woman morally guiding and spiritually inspiring or redeeming a husband or a son' (311), it is significant that Rosa is not the one to redeem Tartar, who instead represents much of what the ideal domestic goddess is supposed to offer to a male protagonist. Dickens informs us that the sailor's chambers are already 'the neatest, the cleanest, and the best-ordered chambers ever seen under the sun, moon and stars' (236), and his time with Rosa places him in the position of offering stability and inspiration to Rosa. Tartar needs no redemption; he is the morally guiding and spiritually inspiring househusband to redeem *her*.

There is however a third popular candidate for Rosa's husband to challenge this: Edwin Drood. In the 1870s, especially when Forster's account was either unpublished or still circulating, Tartar proved less popular a choice than Edwin. Slater's earlier projection for Rosa rests on the idea that her rising 'above her own frivolity' will be 'like Bella before her' (287), and certainly the precedent of Bella Wilfer in *Our Mutual Friend* has been readily noted and used as a means of projecting her plot onto Rosa's. As early as 1871 the comparison was being made, in *The Dublin Review*, not only with the existing text of *Drood* but as a means of speaking with certainty on the content of the missing conclusion:

> 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood' is, in some respects, a singular repetition of its immediate predecessor. In 'Our Mutual Friend'; and in 'Edwin Drood,' we have a young lady and a young gentleman betrothed to one another by other people, and very doubtful of the wisdom of the arrangement. In both, the young man disappears, the young lady believes him to be dead, and is affectionately guarded by his confidential friend (in each case an amiable eccentric) who is the only person in possession of the secret. Julius Handford and Edwin Drood, Bella Wilfer and Rosa Bud, Mr Boffin and Mr Grewgious, lay analogous parts in these stories… . (329)

Early solutions, keen to prove the mystery had a twist in the tale, resurrected Drood, and having done so married him off to Rosa after all. In doing so the writers conformed to social expectations of marital agreements rather than championing the young people's decision to defy their parent's wishes. A number of the early completions hint heavily at how foolish Rosa and Edwin had been when they broke off their engagement – a direct contradiction of Dickens's emphatically positive description of it. T.P. James, in his 1874 completion, writes a glowing reference for the sagacity of fathers as Edwin both announces his love for Rosa and acknowledges her reciprocal feelings:

> Our fathers could look into the future after all, and notwithstanding we tried so hard to go contrary to their last wishes, affliction came with its sharp teeth, and, tearing away the weeds of frivolity that hid our hearts from us, disclosed that which we should never have known else – that we could love each other dearly… . (461)

In her 1878 completion, Gillian Vase offered the same conclusion of Edwin and Rosa overcoming their youthful folly to marry at last, but she elongated the maturing process of the couple. No sooner does Edwin return – alive – but Rosa sends him away to prove his love is not just a passing fancy, to which Edwin readily agrees:

> Let me earn your love, sweetest! I do not deserve it yet, I know. The remembrance of the careless indifference with which I treated you, when I was a foolish boy who did not know your worth, is the bitterest drop in my cup of sorrow. Let me work for you, prove myself worthy of you, if that be possible… . (3:273)

Years then pass, such an interim that allows Helena and Crisparkle to have a child before Edwin eventually returns, and in that time Rosa begins to regret sending Edwin away:

> She had bid him remain her brother, and now she is hurt, angry, mortified that he does her bidding. She had warned him to approach no nearer, and now her heart sinks low because he does not cast her warning to the wind. An enigma? She and all her sex? Yes, truly, not only to Mr Grewgious, but to her own puzzled heart! (3:324)

Not only is Rosa depicted as a foolish young thing when she breaks from Edwin but moreover someone who does not know her own heart. Again, this utterly undoes the power of the original breaking of the engagement in Dickens's text, robbing the pair of their moment of maturity and rewriting it as a false impression conceived by immaturity and lack of self-knowledge.

The irony is that on first consideration we might think that accepting Forster's comments and marrying Rosa off to Tartar could be argued as the most conventional ending for her, if we take it to be what Dickens intended. But, in actuality, pairing Rosa to Tartar challenges a great deal of the conventional ideas of this childish pet; it allows her the opportunity to evolve and transform into a woman of her own mind and choice. In contrast, attempts to buck Forster's suggestions actually result in a less exciting presentation of Rosa. It undoes what Dickens sets up in the early text of *Drood* and forces the character back into the constraints of a silly, foolish thing who does not know what is best for herself. If anything, marrying Rosa to Edwin, or Neville, is less inspired than allowing her to aspire to Tartar. She becomes either

a damsel in distress or a poster girl for respecting the far-seeing wisdom of parents.

Sub Rosa: unconventional pairings and deviations

The majority of proposed endings to *Drood* see Rosa married off to Tartar, Neville, or Edwin. It is the conventional choice in terms of popularity, then, but conventional also in that each time the decision to marry her to one of those three is perceived, or intended, as uncontroversial. Either the writer is aiming to present what Dickens intended, or the reader's attention is diverted elsewhere to more radical decisions in the solution. Occasionally, however, the culmination of Rosa's plot arc is more unusual. The decision to divert from the majority is often done deliberately and mischievously in order to challenge other solutions, turn them on their head, or simply make this new solution different from what has gone before. Other times it remains, like so many others, as an earnest projection of what the author believes Dickens intended. It should however be noted that in almost all instances these different outcomes for Rosa are linked not to her character specifically but tend to be the side effect of new plotlines and interpretations of other characters. For example, Henry Morford's 1871 completion, *John Jasper's Secret*, makes no controversial changes to Rosa directly, even concluding the book with Tartar as her husband (three years before Forster would make Dickens's intentions for this public). However, he radically changes the character of Grewgious in such a way that has an impact on the portrayal of Rosa. Almost every other completion and solution has interpreted Grewgious as a father figure to Rosa, reading his enduring love for her mother as a means of making her into his surrogate daughter – the child he might have had. Morford interprets Grewgious's affections quite differently, assuming that, as he loved the mother, so too he will be attracted to the daughter. Grewgious not only loves Rosa but at times believes that she loves him too.

> For one instant a mad, delicious thought ran through him, making every pulse tingle, sending the blood like a torrent to cheek and brow, and lifting the sad, patient old heart so high as to choke utterance. What if – – – The other words of the mental sentence were never supplied, for before they could be shaped, came the one crushing word, forming a sentence in itself: Impossible! and behind it rang out two others, used so many times before, and forming another pregnant sentence: Old Fool! Then the rebellious heart sank back to its proper place, the momentary madness passed from face and frame, the throat ceased choking, and the voice returned… . (137)

He becomes a less malevolent mirror of Jasper, with the key difference being that, as soon as he realises her affections lie elsewhere, he gracefully steps back

having never uttered a word to her of it. With Tartar marrying Rosa, and the resurrected Edwin marrying Helena, Grewgious thus stands with Neville and Crisparkle as what Morford describes as 'the trio of the disappointed' who become '[s]omething more: the trio of the brave, patient and determined under that disappointment most difficult to bear of all laid upon humanity' (217). Grewgious, with the others, becomes a noble and romantic figure to be admired for what is set to be an everlasting but unrequited romantic love for Rosa. She is unaware of any of it, the innocent cause of another man's pain. Her unintentional cruel beauty claims both Grewgious and Jasper as its victims, shifting the blame from the inappropriateness of their affections onto the object of them. Rosa becomes a femme fatale, or rather an infant fatale, unwittingly stirring feelings in older men. By redefining Grewgious's role it necessarily impacts on Rosa's portrayal too, stripping her of agency and awareness and objectifying her into something for men to lust over.

A more dramatic rewriting of Rosa's fate comes in the rebranding of Jasper as hero. As the novel's antihero, Jasper is clearly the character of most interest to the reader, and as such some have tried to develop the character into someone we can sympathise with. Felix Aylmer's bizarre 1964 solution *The Drood Case* posits that Jasper never intended to kill Edwin but was in fact trying to *save* him from a family curse inherited from Edwin's father. Years earlier, Aylmer posits, Drood Senior 'was in Egypt in 1815' (47), where he seduced a girl, their illegitimate child being Jasper. The girl's father challenged Drood Senior to a duel, in which Rosa's father was his friend's second. After winning the duel, Drood Senior, 'whether in self-defence or from ungovernable passion', carries on 'to attack a second member of the family', with Bud Senior intervening to avert 'a second tragedy' (56). The outcome of this is that Drood Senior is now involved 'in a blood-feud' while simultaneously 'Bud [Senior] would have placed the Muslim family in his debt' (56). Thus Drood Senior is condemned to die while Bud Senior is placed under a protective blessing, the one cancelling the other out: this is why Rosa is engaged to Edwin, so that, when the children inherit their fathers' curse and blessing, the one will once again neutralise the other. Only Jasper knows the truth, and for love of his nephew he ignores his own feelings for Rosa to ensure the marriage goes ahead and Edwin is saved from the hordes of Egyptian assassins bent on his destruction (it bears mentioning that Aylmer, like many Droodists before him, insists that his analysis is 'based exclusively on evidence' that he has found within the pages of *Drood* [4]). When the assassins nearly get Edwin, he mistakenly believes it was Jasper, so that the whole of Cloisterham believe Jasper to be a villain, leading to a deathbed scene in which Jasper, fatally wounded after the most recent attack, admits all to Edwin and Rosa, who are now in love and feel wretched over their horrendous misreading of Jasper's character. Jasper dies, having been 'hounded to death by the misinformed and uncharitable treatment of the community in which he lives', to be vindicated by 'the heartbroken penitence of Rosa' (171). It is a tortuous and convoluted rewriting of the original text, and one that dangerously places

Rosa's stalker as a wretched, misunderstood hero. It is a vindication of every man who ever refused to give up on a woman, and a slap in the face for every woman who has ever tried to explain that no means no. Aylmer even proposes 'evidence that Dickens originally intended to bring Jasper and Rosa together in the end' (169) by arguing that the pair are fictionalised versions of Dickens and Ellen Ternan. He does this not to suggest unsavoury tones in Dickens's affair but rather to legitimise Jasper's prolonged pursuit of Rosa. In Aylmer's hands Rosa herself is reduced to an apology on behalf of women, and the reader, for their hasty judgement on men like Jasper.

Despite his hinting of 'evidence', ultimately Aylmer keeps Jasper's love for Rosa unrequited, in order to make his hero the purer and more angelic in his celibacy. But others have drawn on Jasper's darkness to suggest a more carnal desire not only from him for Rosa, but from Rosa for him. Jasper becomes Rosa's id, the hidden side of her that she tries to keep down while acting in such ways as Victorian manners dictate. In Vase's 1878 completion, Rosa owns and recognises the connection between herself and Jasper, terrifying as it is to her. When he confronts her alone, at a point when she still believes Edwin to be dead, she submits to the connection they have, however perverse it may be:

> Let us be patient with one another! Let us speak like reasonable beings over our hard fate! A strange and unaccountable destiny has ordained that you should love me … and the same destiny has ordained that I – that I should not be able to return the feeling … I am willing … to meet you halfway, and to bear my share of the suffering to which we are condemned. I promise you, if you will abandon your pursuit of me – which makes me wretched, and which can be productive of no other result to you – by my most sacred word and honour, to remain single all my life, to accept no man as a suitor or a husband, and, in this way, to give you no reason for hatred or jealousy of another; only begging you to leave me undisturbed to my solitary life and lonely fate to which your love will have consigned me. (288–9)

It is simultaneously a moment of submission and ownership, a proactive decision on Rosa's part to end this, but in such a manner that will forever tie her to Jasper. The fatality of the moment is emphasised in the continuation of the scene where Vase elevates Jasper to gothic monster and relegates Rosa to the gothic damsel in distress. Surprised in their meeting by the distant approach of Tartar and Crisparkle, Jasper grabs Rosa and tries to escape, in response to which she faints.

> With sudden impulse, he sprang up the bank of the river, and standing upon its brink, looked back towards his pursuers, and then down upon the face resting on his shoulder.

> He had never seen it so beautiful, he fancied. No, not even when flushed with health and happiness. Her bright luxuriant hair hung disheveled over his arm and framed in a face, pale as death, and chaste and pure as marble.
>
> Tenderly, almost reverently, he stroked back the soft, clinging curls, and let his eyes feast for the last time in contemplation of her beauty – beauty which had brought them both to this – to this.
>
> Then he bowed his head, and pressed convulsively his burning, passionate lips on her pure cold ones; raised her high in the air in full sight of his pursuers, who stood still, paralysed with terror; clasped her to his heart again; and with a wild cry of defiance and exultation, sprang with her into the river. (294–5)

Rosa and Jasper become bound together. Jasper becomes another Heathcliff, with shades of Quasimodo, nurturing a love for Rosa despite her revulsion, so that we are unclear whether he is the villain for his pursuit of her, or she is the villain for her refusal to accept him. In Morford, Aylmer, and Vase's interpretations Rosa becomes either passive and unaware or capricious in her withholding of affection for he who most admires her. Others have averted this by giving her full ownership of Jasper's affections and imagining a love affair blooming between the two. It is perhaps not coincidental that these solutions are intentionally erotic. Roman de la Rose's *The Blossoming of the Bud* and Laurie Love's *Mr Jasper's Cadenza* allow Rosa to give in to her darkest desires and complete her sexual maturing. In doing so she faces concern and condemnation from townsfolk who increasingly suspect Jasper (though both cases argue for his innocence of Edwin's death). Both Rose and Love's solutions are part wish-fulfilment on the authors' part – Love in particular notes a great debt to the portrayal of Jasper by Matthew Rhys in the 2012 BBC adaptation 'clad in black, tightly buttoned, dark features, dark hair, repressed lust' (author's note) for stirring her imagination and attraction to the character – but also a redefinition of Rosa for the modern age. No longer bound by Victorian morality, she dismisses the other men in favour of the most interesting character in the book. Good manners and socially acceptable marriages are rejected in favour of lust and physical gratification. Jasper becomes the choice for a Rosa who is older and wiser, who sees beyond what society expects to find the person who, against all odds, is the right personal choice for her.

The final radical choice for Rosa is to reject men altogether. Helena Landless's fiercely defensive stance over Rosa in Dickens's text – her 'wild black hair' is said to fall 'protectingly over [Rosa's] childish form', while 'a slumbering gleam of fire in [her] intense dark eyes' is 'softened with compassion and admiration' (71) – has proved ripe for speculation in modern criticism, with Holly Furneaux pointing out the homoerotic nature of their relationship: 'The foreignness that renders Jasper's intense feeling for his nephew visible as homoeros, has continuities in the relationship that the repatriated Helena Landless enjoys with the

English Rosa' (166). Yet, even in an age of online fanfiction and the wide range of interpretations this encourages, little has been done to flesh out the idea of a lesbian Rosa. The closest is in Rupert Holmes's 1985 musical, in which Edwin is played by a woman. Holmes positions Dickens's text as a performance in a Victorian music hall, with a subsequent degree of meta-theatre and self-awareness. In one sense the casting of a woman in the role of Edwin confirms his sexual incompatibility with Rosa (by Victorian society standards), and yet, during the breaking of the engagement, the song they perform, 'Perfect Strangers', is the closest that Holmes's adaptation gets to a romantic duet.

Rosa: If we were perfect strangers
How perfect life could be!
Drood: I'd know if I adore you
You'd know if you love me… (40)

It is not a total denial of their love for one another but a recognition that the arrangement of their marriage without their consent has robbed them of the chance to know what their true feelings for one another are. The duet's final couplet, 'If we'd been perfect strangers/I might have loved you perfectly' (40), sung in unison, hints at a love that under different circumstances might almost be, indeed, perfect – and it is sung by two women. Yet, the show's biggest impact on opening up Rosa's interpretation is in its famous ending, in which audiences vote for the solution of their choice. They are allowed to decide who kills Edwin and who is Dick Datchery, and to pick one male and one female to marry one another. As Holmes himself has noted, this usually leads to audiences deliberately picking the most inappropriate or unexpected pairing: he pronounces himself 'pleased to say that during its entire run on Broadway and in Central Park, no audience ever elected Jasper as Murderer' (71). On stage Rosa has been paired to Jasper, Crisparkle, Bazzard, Durdles, or even Deputy. It is an instinctive human reaction, when given the choice, to try to be original and unconventional for the fun of it. Holmes's musical has allowed audiences not to vote for the Rosa they think Dickens intended but to deliberately vote against that and create a new Rosa beyond the imagination of her creator.

This defiance of Dickens was continued in the aforementioned 2012 BBC adaptation. Despite the audience's appreciation of Rhys's Jasper, Rosa in the hands of screenwriter Gwyneth Hughes had an entirely original finale planned: she married no one. Hughes called it her 'great pleasure to rescue 17-year-old Rosa from the Dickensian fate of an early disastrous marriage' (279). Dickens's apparent plan for his heroine to mature has taken on a new meaning as the plot itself has matured in its attitudes in the century and a half since it was written. Hughes's completion reflects the attitudes of the time it was written rather than respecting the attitudes of the 19th century when it began. Hughes's mention of a 'Dickensian fate' means that celebrating Rosa goes hand in hand with demonising Dickens: it confirms the worst prejudices about his female characters by deliberately setting this new Rosa up as a demolition of the original. It unintentionally resurrects the old prejudices of Dickens's failings in writing female

characters, but ironically it does so in relation to one of his few women who might actually be poised to break the mould. Hughes's singleton Rosa is a Rosa for the modern age, but (assuming Forster's summary to be correct) Dickens's married Rosa, dismissing the wishes of her parents to choose for herself, is just as bold a step forward for its time, if not ours. Rosa had the potential to be something new in Dickens's writing, and had that plotline been confirmed I believe it would have had a greater impact on our understanding of Dickens than the fate of Edwin or the identity of Datchery ever could.

The end crowns all: the importance of Rosa's choice

It will have been observed by now that the predominant focus has been on Rosa's endpoint in the story, specifically whom she marries (*if* she marries). It is not the most diverse plot projection, but it is telling. Those working out their theories on *Drood* frequently start from the end and work backwards. For an author penning a completion, characters become defined by where they have to end up. If they have decided that Rosa is going to marry Edwin, then they will by necessity devote their characterisation of Rosa to building towards this end. Depending on her suitor she will become rebellious or regretful, modest or mischievous, feisty or feeble. The end infers the journey taken and determines the character's arc accordingly. But, more than this, it reflects our own preoccupations and presumptions at the time at which each completion is written. The endings written for Rosa are remarkably diverse: meekly acknowledging the wisdom of her parents and accepting at last their choice of Edwin; leaving Cloisterham to find romance with a sailor in the big city; dismissing social expectations completely for carnal pleasure with the man accused of her fiancé's murder; or just giving up on men altogether. All of this speaks of the potential within ourselves to shape and reorder Dickens to suit our needs and desires. Without that definite end before us in black and white, Rosa's choice is our choice. The ending we choose for her – the ending we *want* for her – reflects not only our own ideas of what constitutes a Dickensian heroine but moreover what we demand and expect as a satisfactory resolution for women characters. It mirrors the neo-Victorian afterlives of Miss Havisham explored in Chapter 4, where the ending is the foregone conclusion. In contrast to the tragedy of Miss Havisham that must be played out repeatedly, each generation adapts Rosa to meet their expectations. Her fluidity, hinted at in Dickens's writing and unintentionally expanded by *Drood*'s unfinished status, has allowed her to become, in many respects, a heroine for all.

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CHAPTER 6

'The Thing and Not the Thing': The Contemporary Dickensian Novel and Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch* (2013)

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The reviews were in, and they were unanimous. Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch* (2013) was Dickensian. Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times* wrote, 'In this astonishing Dickensian novel, Mrs Tartt uses her myriad talents—her tactile prose, her knowledge of her characters' inner lives, her instinct for suspense—to immerse us in a fully imagined world' (Kakutani C1). *The New York Times Book Review's* 10 Best Books of 2013 called the book 'Intoxicating … like the best of Dickens, the novel is packed with incident and populated with vivid characters' ('10 Best' 12). In *USA Today*, Kevin Nance wrote, 'A massively entertaining, darkly funny new book that goes a long way toward explaining why its author is finally securing her place alongside the greatest American Novelists of the past half century, including … Philip Roth, Toni Morrison and that other latter-day Dickensian, John Irving' (Nance). And finally, providing a kind of keynote for this chapter, Jessica Duffin Wolfe wrote,

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> Some have suggested *Bleak House* as a corollary, but to me, the Dickens novel that *The Goldfinch* most resembles is *Great Expectations*. Pip's struggles reappear in Tartt's portrayal of a child caught up in adult trouble, in the guilt—good grief, the guilt—and nostalgia of Theo's first-person narration. Indeed, Tartt's utterly antiquarian book is driven by a madness for the past and its relics that is as much Walter Scott as Dickens. (Wolfe)

In *The Goldfinch*, an adolescent protagonist, Theo, is orphaned when a terrorist bomb blast at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art kills his beloved mother. In the ensuing confusion, he ends up taking a priceless 1654 painting, *The Goldfinch* by Carel Fabritius, that becomes his dark secret and that thrums under the plot. An orphan and a mystery is a promising Dickensian beginning. As we'll see, Tartt rummages through all of Dickens with direct and indirect corollaries, relics, touchstones, and narrative strategies with an 'antiquarian's' devotion to transport us back into the past.

First, and most obviously, Tartt uses structural and thematic features clearly borrowed from Dickens. Structural elements include the early glimpse of a colourful minor character who will serve as a link to a major plot later in the novel (à la Herbert Pocket in *Great Expectations*). We get a glimpse of a young red-haired girl, Pippa, who, like Estella, will become Theo's pole star and eventual love interest. Old-fashioned Dickensian foreshadowing is also a favourite tactic of Tartt. There might be the portentous mention of sailing and a central character's fear of open water, and that guarantees a shipwreck and a drowning later (echoes of Steerforth). Structurally, it is a classic *Bildungsroman* in the spirit of *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*: as in Dickens, there is an emphasis on wealth and class disparities. In *The Goldfinch* much is made of the gap between Theo's marginal social standing and his well-heeled friend (and almost in-law) Andy Barbour's Upper East Side privilege. And, like Pip, Twist, or Nicholas Nickleby, we see how a promising, though impoverished, youth might be of interested to wealthy benefactors.

I say Pip *or* Twist, because Tartt is gifted at the character 'off rhyme' – where a blend of attributes makes us think of other like characters without a single, direct correlation. For instance, Theo is committed to the memory of his mother's boho youth. She was a former model, a would-be actress, a muse to artists and actors, and a PhD candidate at NYU in art history. This puts one in the mind of loveable bohemians like the Micawbers or Crummleses. In fact, Theo's fairy godfather, the benevolent antique dealer Hobie, is not so much a Cheeryble brother as a Mr Brownlow, Mr Micawber, or perhaps even Nell's grandfather in *The Old Curiousity Shop*. He is all of these in one way or another, a Dickensian composite.[1] When Theo is informed by Hobie that his story has appeared in the papers, he describes it as 'an orphan's plight … a charity-minded socialite steps in' story. In other words, even inside the world of the novel, Theo's plight has almost immediately been fictionalised into something resembling Oliver

Twist and Brownlow. What's more, the red-haired Pippa whom Theo sees just prior to the explosion that changes his life also resembles other orphan wards: Pip, of course, but also Little Nell and to a lesser extent Esther in *Bleak House*. She shares a resemblance to Estella with another character. The socialite who steps in will come to resemble Miss Havisham, and Theo's friend Boris will be explicitly compared to the Artful Dodger.[2] The meaning of these corollaries, composites, or cobbled-together assemblages grow later as it becomes clear the novel is interested in cobbled-together copies.

It is less an adaptation in the traditional sense than the neo-Victorian rewritings discussed in Chapter 4 of this volume. It also employs thematic and character borrowings as traced in Kathy Rees's discussion of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in Chapter 2 and Francesca Arnanvas's treatment of *The Diamond Age* in Chapter 7. These inheritors' books make it seem as if there is an agreed-upon set of characteristics to copy (the imperilled runaway, the magical benefactor, the band of larcenous orphans), but that the copies must be indirect: a barely traceable fingerprint rather than a facsimile.

One of Tartt's most potent Dickensian tools is her style of initial character description. Mr Barbour (one of Theo's early benefactors and a Dickensian 'absent father'), initially a genial presence but ultimately becoming a broken, troubled figure, is given a theatrical Dickensian description on his first appearance, Tartt's single most Dickensian habit:

> Mr. Barbour was a tiny bit strange-looking with something pale and silvery about him as if his treatments in the Connecticut 'ding farm' (as he called it) had rendered him incandescent; his eyes were a queer gray and his hair was pure white, which made him seem older than he was until you noticed that his face was young and pink—boyish even. His ruddy cheeks with his long, old-fashioned nose, in combination with the prematurely white hair gave him the amiable look of a lesser founding father, some minor member of the Continental Congress teleported to the twenty-first century. (96)

This is in an old-fashioned character description – a big block of text on the character's first appearance, with a list, giving bright outsized detail and repetition (white hair twice), explicit judgement ('strange-looking') and a link to an external referent (founding father). It certainly resembles the Dickens method: 'Uncle Pumblechook: a large hard-breathing middle-aged slow man, with a mouth like a fish, dull staring eyes and sandy hair standing upright on his head, so that it looked as if had just been all but choked' (*GE* 42). Like Pumblechook's fish mouth and 'standing upright' hair, or Wemmick's square 'wooden face' and 'post-office box mouth', Mr Barbour's almost cartoonish 'incandescent' appearance is meant to summon an external image, in this case, the image on a 20-dollar bill—and readers are to remember that bold, broad stroke image and that hair. In contrast, much of modern fiction salts in description or leaves it out altogether. External markers like extravagant hair as an indication of character


C FABRITIVS 1654

are frowned upon. Tartt leans pretty heavily on laid-on externals, what we'll see later Hobie will call (in reference to antiques) 'patina': easily applied referents and brand names to conjure instant images and provide unearned associations. Old movies, *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *A Christmas Carol* and *Great Expectations*, are all deployed for quick descriptions and shorthands.

So, as the reviewers point out, there are many Dickensian correspondences. But what is the meaning of these correspondences and how do they function? First, Donna Tartt uses description, lists, and catalogues to propel us back in time, and she seems to self-consciously use what Tracy C. Davis calls 'recombinative' techniques to build her novel, and then mirrors that in the work done in the book's antique shop (the reconstruction and reclamation of antique furniture), and the painting that are both at the centre of the novel. But, finally, what is most compelling is where Tartt diverges from Dickens, most notably in the absence of comedy.

The Dickensian heart of the novel is the basement workshop of that antique shop 'Hobart and Blackwell' and its shaggy owner, Hobart (Hobie). The artifacts produce their own 'atmosphere' that ushers the young protagonist Theo backward:

> Hobie lived and wafted … in his own mild atmosphere, the dark brown of tea stains and tobacco, where every clock in the house said something different and time didn't actually correspond to the standard measure but instead meandered along at its own sedate tick-tock, obeying the pace of his antique-crowded backwater, far from the factory-built, epoxy-glued version of the world. (489)

When Theo looks through the dusty window, he sees:

> Staffordshire dogs and majolica cats, dusty crystal, tarnished silver, antique chairs and settees upholstered in sallow old brocade, an elaborate faience birdcage, miniature marble obelisks atop a marble-topped pedestal table and a pair of alabaster cockatoos. It was the kind of shop my mother would have liked—packed tightly, a bit dilapidated, with stacks of old books on the floor. (145)

The shop is a time-travelling portal, what Theo's mum calls a 'Time Tunnel' (20), and, once inside, we get more epic catalogues that put reader in a Dickensian mood: 'In the shop behind-the-shop, the tall-case clocks ticked, the mahogany glowed, the light filtered in a golden pool on the dining room tables, the life of the downstairs menagerie went on' (206).

Figure 6.1: ***The Goldfinch***, Carel Fabritius, 1654. Copyright: Mauritshuis, The Hague (2018), reproduced with permission. The painting at the heart of the novel.

The lists are serving a purpose beyond description.[3] They are meant to waft us into the past. The lists are too long and drowsy-making to be scene-setting. They are literally intoxicating, and, as the repeated mention of the 'tick' 'of the tall-case clock' suggests, pleasantly drowsy-making. It is a place, he says, where:

> without even realising it you slipped away sometimes into 1850, a world of ticking clocks and creaking floorboards, copper pots and baskets of turnips and onions in the kitchen, candle flames leaning all to the left in the draft of an opened door and tall parlor windows billowing and wagged like ball gowns, cool quiet rooms where old things slept. (210)

The mention of how his long-dead mother would have liked the shop hints at its purpose as a means of time travel. The shop immediately connects him with his mother. Tartt gives us these lists throughout, making it a signature move of the book: the hypnotic, lulling quality of the lists can even 'lull [Theo] to sleep' and back into the shop-behind-the-shop when he is away from it. It is both the antique items and the hypnotic contemplation of them that transports, as if in a trance. Its method of time travel is part of the project seemingly borrowed from another well-known contemporary novel interested in time travel, Jack Finney's *Time and Again*.

In *Time and Again*, time travel is achieved by putting the protagonist (Simon Morley) in a room in the Dakota Apartment building – looking out on Central Park – and surrounded by period furnishings from 1882. Both novels are concerned with how seemingly inconsequential actions in the past can affect the future.[4] Both novels argue that once placed in the appropriate atmosphere, the past comes rushing back. In both novels, Central Park, Gramercy Park, W. 57th Street, Greenwich Village, and antique shops are touchstones and portals to the past. At a key early moment of *The Goldfinch*, moments before her death, Theo and his mother are walking up Fifth Avenue along Central Park, and she stops and says, 'Time warp'. Theo asks her what she means, and she tells him that the location, so unchanged, is like a 'time tunnel' that propels her into the past:

> 'Up here … Upper Park is one of the few places where you can still see what the city looked like in the 1890s. Gramercy Park too, and the Village, some of it. When I first came to New York I thought this neighborhood was Edith Wharton and *Franny and Zooey* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* all rolled into one.' (20)

Central Park serves the same purpose in this novel as it does in *Time and Again*: transit to the past. And Tartt seems to be gesturing toward *Time and Again* without (for once) explicitly naming it, by saying this Central Park view is 'what the city looked like in the 1890s'. With the compulsive cultural referentiality of the novel (and the characters) it would not be surprising that Theo's mother is thinking of this much re-produced 1894 photo from *Time and Again*, which serves as proof of that protagonist's journey into the past. Tartt almost certainly is. Simon Morley snaps the picture during one of his time travels:

Figure 6.2: ***Skating in Central Park in front of the Dakota, c.1890***. Photograph by J.S. Johnston. Copyright: The New York Historical Society (2018), reproduced with permission.

> Halfway across the park … I took the photo on the opposite page. I like it; it shows how alone the Dakota was. But I didn't allow too well for the reflected light from the ice, and embarrassingly, it's overexposed. There was a man in the middle foreground, for example, wearing a silk topper, and I don't know if you can see him… . (242)

The protagonist steps into that past – propelled by the assemblage of objects and locations, like the unchanged Central Park. He then captures it (apologising for the poor quality) but also validating that this picture is his by pointing to that man in the 'silk topper' in the foreground. That seems to be the method of *The Goldfinch* for both the character and the reader. With this use of Central Park, Tartt is slyly making that point. 'Here,' she seems to be saying, 'is a novel that is the means of your transportation into the past, and proof of my ability to transport you.'

The way the book worms deep into the basement workshop seems an effort to will the modern world away – or to locate a 19th-century hideaway in a 21st-century novel. As in Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* (discussed in Chapter 7), the Dickensian past is used as a springboard to the future. Hypnosis produced by the contemplation of antiques (and some literal hypnosis in *Time and Again*)

is the means in both books of getting to the past you wish to live in. As constructed by Tartt, Hobie's shop is a warm, inviting place that you might see in Dickens novels (operating as a similarly inviting sanctuaries, like the Old Curiosity Shop, do there), and it is the way that Theo also uses it in this novel. Like Mr Venus, Hobie lives among 'the lovely trophies of [his] art'. And, just as in Dickens, the reclamation of furniture that occurs in this shop is akin to the novel's theme of time travel and reclamation: of the Fabritius painting, of the love of the lost mother and the time before her violent death, and even of the Victorian novel itself.

But the description of *The Goldfinch* as 'Dickensian' is in the end, however, not quite true. A 'Dickensian' text should go beyond these plot points and markers, these external correspondences. It is in the intangibles. Linda Hutcheon, speaking of textual influence and citing Dickens as an example, writes:

> Many professional reviewers and audience members alike resort to the elusive notion of the 'spirit' of a work or an artist that has to be conveyed in an adaptation for it to be a success. The 'spirit' of Dickens or [Richard] Wagner is invoked, often to justify the radical changes in the 'letter' or the form. Sometimes it's the 'tone' that is deemed central, though rarely defined. But all three are arguably subjective and it would appear difficult to discuss, much less theorize. (10)

The Goldfinch is, of course, not an adaptation. But the way adaptation theory talks about film adaptations, sequels, and prequels as not being 'faithful' copies but containing the DNA of the original is helpful here. *The Goldfinch* employs the 'recombinative' strategies of adaptations: using elements and strands of previous works to create new ones (Davis 13).[5] Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon argue that the 'homology' or 'similarity in structure that is indicative of a common origin' is key to understanding the story's 'replication' in a new form (Bortolotti and Hutcheon 444). Bortolotti and Hutcheon are most concerned with the various 'vehicles'—memes, genes, or elements—that allow for this replication. As we have seen, *The Goldfinch* contains many genetic markers of the Dickensian, but some essential strand or binding material (nucleotide) is missing.[6] *The Goldfinch* seems to be an example of what Linda Hutcheson describes as 'a creative and interpretive act of appropriation' fitting 'along a continuum of fluid relationships between prior works and later—and lateral—revisitations of them' (Hutcheon 8, 171). John Bryant talks about how one text can capture elements of and then perhaps 'part of the energy' of the initial text but how, as is the case here, it might conversely have all the markers but somehow lose that energy (62).[7] In the same way, Laurena Tsudama's treatment of *The Wire* in Chapter 8 demonstrates that a Dickensian influence can be cited explicitly by characters and creators but be most present in 'how reality is represented' and betraying the DNA of 'Dickens's representational strategies'.

Tone/voice and what the voice knows

When talking about the replication of a 'spirit', Hutcheon points to 'tone' and 'style'. The tone of the first-person voice used in *The Goldfinch* is transparent, conversational, and knowing. It is a style that readers of Tartt's *The Secret History* will recognise: the narrator who knows and yet does not know. The narrator tells us that he is 'blind' to his future and does not see the 'shadow' of a parting overhead but, in telling us this on page 15, he is signalling that a big change is about to come. Indeed, since the novel begins with the adult character hiding out in a hotel room in Amsterdam – this first-person voice knows almost everything at the outset (how he got to that hotel room, how it connects with the disaster that is the novel's inciting incident, how the painting that he more or less unwittingly takes from the Met after the terrorist attack leads inexorably to that hotel room). We know almost nothing. It is a very modern scrambled chronology: begin at the end and rewind. Tartt's narrator is careful to guide us from outside the narrative. 'It strikes me now, though it didn't then' is a frequent phrase that reminds you the narrative is happening from a point in the far future, but, even without these signposts, the narrative would have a 'from the future quality' to it. The narrator has perspective on the childhood events that, in Dickens, often disappears as soon as we enter the child's view of his world. That move, from distant past to immediate present, is the crucial thing *The Goldfinch* loses.

Still, like much of Dickens's *oeuvre*, the novel is a page turner. It is impossible to put down, and slightly melodramatic in its mechanics. As the novel plunges forward from explosive inciting incident to disastrous effects and from event to event, you see dominoes toppling and can barely catch your breath between the short chapters. Pressing it all forward is the 'how did he get here?' question of the frame narrative. A disaster kicked off the novel and, because of the narrator's predicament, you know a disaster awaits him. But, when you think of Dickens novels told from the point of view of an adult narrator recounting childhood adventures, you think of those that begin with a child who behaves in a way that does not indicate that he knows what will happen next, e.g. *David Copperfield*. Even when the whole narrative is in the past, those narrators might state, 'Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own tale, or that station will be held by someone else, these pages must show…' and then plunge into the child's present.

Likewise, in *Great Expectations*, when Pip encounters Magwitch, he knows the history that will unfold. When he meets Estella, or Herbert for that matter, there is some foreshadowing, but we never feel as if that moment in the story is not being lived. When he suffers under the tyranny of Mrs Joe, or comforted by Joe Gargery, we do not have the immediacy drained by a 'little did I know…'. We see the pangs of guilt (where he says, 'but I was capable of any meanness towards Joe or his name') and pointers forward like this one:

> There have been occasions in my later life (I suppose as in most lives) when I have felt for a time as if a thick curtain had fallen on all its interest and romance, to shut me out from anything save dull endurance any more. Never has that curtain dropped so heavy and blank, as when my way in life lay stretched out straight before me through the newly entered road of apprenticeship to Joe. (*Great Expectations* 114)

Tartt seems to self-consciously echo the parenthetical, the curtain, and the foreshadowing look backwards and forwards: 'I like to think of myself as a perceptive person (as I suppose we all do) and in setting all this down, it's tempting to pencil a shadow in overhead. But I was blind and deaf to the future, my single crushing worry was the meeting at school' (15). Later in the book, Theo again walks 'the familiar streets' but thinks of his 'old, lost life with his mother'. Tartt even uses the image of the curtain as dividing line between 'before' and 'after': 'it was as if a black curtain had come down on my life in Vegas' (513). But, in Pip's earlier scenes with Joe, there is warmth and detail of character that places us at the table with Pip's badly spelled epistle, or secreting bread from Mrs Joe. We will not be getting a portentous 'shadow overhead' or 'I was blind and deaf to my future' from a place somewhere above the action.

Pip will come to mourn his bad behaviour and his treatment of Joe, but will not be so clear-sightedly nostalgic for Joe and the old hearth before the fact. Similarly, David Copperfield does not experience the foreboding of his mother's death. To do this would rob early scenes of their bright, lived immediacy. Tartt, who is a smart and skilled novelist, seems to make the trade-off of nostalgia for lived, real-time 'in-scene' experience. Theo, in those opening chapters, continually contemplates the 'last times' he has with his mother before the disaster, and then returns to those 'last times' (last words, last Saturdays at the movies, even a last supper at an otherwise forgettable Italian restaurant) after her death. This has a powerful impact and thematic importance in the 'You neither know the day nor the hour' sense. But in Tartt we are not securely in these moments as the heavily advertised disaster looms. As Rees points out in Chapter 2, it is the same move made by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson of conjuring the past, present, and future simultaneously. In contrast, David Copperfield says,

> Looking back … into the blank of my infancy … the first objects I can remember as standing out by themselves from a confusion of things, are my mother and Peggotty. What else do I remember? Let me see. There comes out of the cloud our house—not new to me, but quite familiar, in its earliest remembrance. On that ground floor is Peggotty's kitchen, opening into a back yard… . (25)

But David (and Dickens) then apologises for the long stretch of scenic overview: 'Here is a long passage—what an enormous perspective I make of it!' (25),

and then slides into the first dialogue with Peggotty, and from that moment we are in vivid lived reality.

The opening chapters of *The Goldfinch*, on the other hand, are suffused with nostalgia before the fact. In any event, on his return to New York, 20 years later, Theo feels the pull of nostalgia for the lost places and he feels that 'black curtain' come down on his intervening 'life in Vegas'.[8] Most of the New York sections exist in this hazy 'cloud' of remembrance – a mostly satisfying atmosphere of past mingled with present. We can see that it closely tracks Dickens's language. But what is missing?

Humour

Tartt has many gifts: she is an extraordinary storyteller—she is, like Dickens, unafraid of taking big risks – making large leaps in place and time, embracing coincidence that approaches 'magic', and she has an exquisite eye for telling description. She has a gift for images that are familiar and new and filled with energy that might make you think of Dickens's fresh way of seeing the world: 'Light from the street flew in black bands across the floor' (107). She has a sense of the interior, often irrational, ways a person might deal with the death of a parent and the difficulty of the world not caring: 'the thought of returning to any kind of normal routine seemed disloyal, wrong … it's hard to believe the world had ended and yet somehow these ridiculous activities kept grinding on' (110). That is cleared-eyed, sharp, and true. Tartt does deadened endurance well. But throughout the novel, as Theo is hiding a priceless masterpiece and even as he comes close to exposure, the crackle of guilt and fear that comedy would allow is absent. Theo simply reports: 'For some reason, during this strained interlude … it occurred to me that maybe I ought to tell Hobie about the painting, or … broach the subject in some oblique manner, to see what his reaction would be. The difficulty was how to bring it up' (214).

Tartt's childhood scenes lack something in texture and wonder and, yes, even pathos for the protagonist's suffering.[9] Dickens's charming, theatrical presentation of childhood memory brings it to life.[10] Pip's misery at the hands of Mr Wopsle and Pumblechook is occasion for laughter as well. In that famous scene from *Great Expectations*, Pip, having stolen food for Magwitch, sits with a 'guilty mind', expecting 'to find a Constable in the kitchen' as Pumblechook sermonises on the similarity between 'swine' and boys like Pip.

> 'True, Sir. Many a moral for the young,' returned Mr. Wopsle, and I knew he was going to lug me in, before he said it; 'might be deduced from that text.'
>
> ('You listen to this,' said my sister to me, in a severe parenthesis. Joe gave me more gravy.)

> 'Swine,' pursued Mr. Wopsle in his deepest voice, and pointing his fork at my blushes, as he were mentioning my Christian name; 'Swine were the companions of the prodigal. 'The gluttony of Swine is put before us as an example for the young.' (I thought this pretty well in him who had been praising up the pork for being so plump and juicy.) 'What is detestable in a pig is more detestable in a boy.' …
>
> 'Besides,' said Mr. Pumblechook, turning sharp on me, 'think what you've got to be grateful for. If you'd been born a Squeaker—'
>
> 'He *was*, if ever a child was,' said my sister, most emphatically.
>
> Joe gave me some more gravy.
>
> 'Well, but I mean a four-footed Squeaker,' said Mr. Pumblechook… . (44–5)

Dickens enters the guilt and shame directly in scene and in dialogue, providing an avenue for the reader to experience Pip's humiliation and enjoy the comedy. He puts us in the scene, so we see the pointed jabs at Pip, and Joe's efforts at consolation, and even Wopsle's and Mr Hubble's crosstalk in real time. With Tartt, you never have this feeling of Theo's vulnerability because Tartt is reporting from a once-removed distance. In Dickens through the means of comedy, there is the frisson and electricity of guilt and fear and exposure.

But, despite *The New York Times* and *USA Today's* claims to the contrary, Tartt is not funny in *The Goldfinch*. Nor, in her defence, as far as I can tell, does she try to be. Of course, comedy and the comic have a mixed reputation, but books on comedy and essays like Steve Almond's 'Funny is the New Deep' are multiplying, and comedy studies seems to be entering into a refreshing period of respectability.[11] But, usually, critics do not feel the loss of the comic when a book is determined to be dark. Often enough, even with books that are decidedly dark *and* comic (*Catch-22*), claims for its respectability seem to insist that it is important despite being comic.[12]

When the comic enters the universe of *The Goldfinch*, it is reported, not enacted: told not shown. Take this example. Theo is wearing the duffel coat of Platt Barbour, the oldest Barbour son, a bully in the Bentley Drummle mould. His 'best friend', Tom Cable, makes a crack about his 'costume' and Theo, we are informed, replies in kind. We are not given the reply but are told 'it was part of our ongoing dark-comedy act, amusing only to us, to abuse and insult each other' (111). 'Amusing only to us' is right. We have no means of judging 'the dark-comedy act'. And note that Tartt, even here, in the reporting of comic hijinks, has to dignify the comic with 'dark' – their 'dark-comedy act'. Then we are told, 'My friendship with Tom had always had a wild, manic quality, something unhinged and hectic and a little perilous about it and though all the same old high energy was still there but the current had been reversed, voltage humming in the opposite direction' (112). Errr… if you say so. It is all past tense for us.

By the time we meet Theo and Tom there is no voltage. We'll get some sense of this later when a little electricity is introduced with his Russian friend Boris. There, you get some of the Artful Dodger's dangerous attraction for Oliver, or Steerforth's magnetic appeal for David. But, even here, rather than hilarity on the page you get this summary report of hilarity: 'everything was funny; everything made us laugh' and 'We knew how to tip each other into hysterics with an arch of an eyebrow or quirk of the mouth' (359). Each other, but not us.

Again and again, Tartt chooses to tell, not show, the hilarity. It is a 'safe' choice if you are uncertain of your comic chops. But it comes at a high cost. When the underpinning of the two boys' relationship cannot be shown – the hilarity, the hysterics – there is something lost in the emotional register. Steve Almond writes:

> Comedy is powered by a determined confrontation with a set of feeling states that are essentially tragic in nature: grief, shame, disappointment, physical discomfort, anxiety. … The best comedy is rooted in the capacity to face unbearable emotions and to offer by means of laughter a dividend of forgiveness. Sometimes these unbearable truths have to do with the world around us, but for the most part they have to do with the world inside us. … The comic impulse consists in being willing the 'dwell' in the awkward shameful places we'd prefer not to dwell. (92)

If you do not show us the intensity in real time, when it ceases we do not feel the loss. Think of the dinner the Finches of the Grove have in *Great Expectations*, or Herbert and Pip's reckoning of accounts, or Herbert's instruction on table manners. Seeing the two friends confronting difficulty and sharing them in the warmth and light of those comic moments (most of which are based on fear and shame) deepens the relationship and heightens the stakes when the dark times come.

Of course, comedy and laughs are only missed if a work declares itself as comic. Usually even doing so is a strategic mistake, because 'this is not funny' or 'I do not find this funny' is pretty certain to come. So avoidance may be good practical policy. But the cost alluded to above is that comedy heightens tragedy and the intermingling of dark and light reflects life.[13] Dickens, of course, said it first in *Oliver Twist* in his famous 'streaky bacon' observation on placing dark and light side by side: 'It is the custom on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas, to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon' (168).

In *Great Expectations*, you will have the comic marriage of Wemmick in Chapter 55, followed by Magwitch's imprisonment and trial in Chapter 56, and Pip's sickness and convalescence under Joe's care in Chapter 57. Even as Pip emerges from his fever, racked with guilt at the way he has treated Joe and

gratitude at how Joe has cared for him, Dickens gives us this exchange on Miss Havisham's death:

> 'Is she dead, Joe?'
>
> 'Why you see, old chap,' said Joe, in a tone of remonstrance, and by way of getting at it by degrees, 'I wouldn't go so far as to say that, for that's a deal to say; but she ain't—'
>
> 'Living, Joe?'
>
> 'That's nigher where it is,' said Joe; 'she ain't living.' (423)

In the report of the death of a character who has meant a lot to Pip (admittedly, not all of it good) and whom he risked his life to save, Dickens layers in the tragedy with the comedy, heightening the moment with a classic joke structure.

The Goldfinch does layer the sunny Las Vegas sections in between the mellow 'Shop behind the Shop' sections. The bright emptiness of Las Vegas is the backdrop for Theo and Boris's drug-fuelled hijinks. But this is the least Dickensian section of the book. Theo and Boris drift around without knowing what to do with themselves. Theo's alcoholic gambler of a father careers out of control in the background, and Theo and Boris might be said to have a moment or two of Steerforth–David intimacy. There is much hilarity and out-of-control laughter *reported*, but we never experience or 'dwell' in any of it. So, when Theo reluctantly leaves Las Vegas, he is unhappy, but I cannot say I was. Back in New York, we are told 'There had been nights in the desert where I was so sick with laughter, convulsed and doubled over with aching stomach for hours on end, I would happily have thrown myself in front of a car to make it stop' (475). It is the hysterical laugher of a disaster survivor, but there is not much joy in it for him or us.

Once back in New York, trying to piece together the life he once led, Theo experiences the 'crossfade' between his memory of the place and the remnants of it that are conjuring it for him. His experience is at least as old as William Wordsworth's notion of how 'collateral objects' become 'habitually dear' and 'all their forms and changeful colors by invisible links were fastened to the affections' (1:597–603).

> It was the first time I'd been anywhere near Sutton Place since returning to New York and it was like falling back into a friendly old dream, crossfade between past and present, pocked texture of the sidewalks and even the same old cracks … lots of the same old places still in business, the deli, the Greek diner, the wine shop, all the forgotten neighborhood faces muddling through my mind. … I was only a few blocks from our old building: and looking down towards Fifty-Seventh Street, that bright familiar alley with sun striking it just right and bouncing gold off the windows I thought Goldie! Jose! (529)

Just as Wordsworth predicts, the place summons the associations 'doomed to sleep'. Theo imagines a reconciliation scene between himself and the building's doormen, and being filled in on all the building's gossip. But, when he turns the corner, he sees a gutted building, now an empty shell. 'It had all seemed so solid, so immutable,' he says, 'the whole system of the building, a nexus where I could always stop in and see people, say hello, and find out what was going on. People who had known my mother. People who had known my father' (531). Time, as in Rees's discussion of Bjørnson, seems to promise connection to the past, but then is a reminder of the 'mutability of life' and the 'relentlessness of time passing'.

Collateral objects and associations and 'invisible links' are sundered. Not for the first time, Theo pities himself. And the 'scenes which were a witness of … joy', 'of obscure feelings representative of things forgotten', are destroyed. Measure this return against Pip's ignominious return to his hometown. Pip's plan when he sees his boyhood nemesis Trabb's boy approaching him on the street is to take the high road befitting his new expectations and gentleman's status. His assumption is that Trabb's boy will be forced to acknowledge his superiority and silently accept his aloof treatment. The problem is that Trabb's boy will not cooperate.

> Casting my eyes along the street at a certain point of my progress, I beheld Trabb's boy approaching, lashing himself with an empty blue bag. Deeming that a serene and unconscious contemplation of him would best beseem me, and would be most likely to quell his evil mind, I advanced with that expression of countenance, and was rather congratulating myself on my success, when suddenly the knees of Trabb's boy smote together, his hair uprose, his cap fell off, he trembled violently in every limb, staggered out into the road, and crying to the populace, 'Hold me! I'm so frightened!' feigned to be in a paroxysm of terror and contrition, occasioned by the dignity of my appearance. As I passed him, his teeth loudly chattered in his head, and with every mark of extreme humiliation, he prostrated himself in the dust. (233)

Where Tartt might elevate to a retrospective height, Dickens stays on the ground. Pip tries to ignore Trabb's boy's paroxysms, which only provokes more ingenuity in the harassment, and ends in Trabb's boy's famous mockery of Pip's attempt to cut him ('Don't know yah!') and Pip's disgraceful 'ejection' 'into the open country' (234).

Two returns to hometowns where the protagonist finds that they have become strangers. In Tartt, we have a global and serious sense of melancholy and distant, almost generic, loss. A philosophical construction worker even shrugs and comments, 'That's the city for you' to displace the personal to the gentrifying general (530). In Dickens, we get a close-up on intense, protracted comic humiliation. We get the hero congratulating himself for the way he's handled

Figure 6.3: ***Chest-on-Chest, Philadelphia, 1750–60***. Daderot CC0/Public domain. Carving attributed to Nicholas Bernard: the kind of furniture which Hobie mimics and 'makes' into what he calls his 'changelings.'

the encounter with his 'subordinate', and then the teeth-chattering, knee-smoting, staggering, 'hold me, I'm so frightened!' enactment of Pip's worst fears. The intimacy of the second seems to impart emotional intensity to the comic encounter – and display Dickens commitment to sticking with the humiliation and the physical discomfort.

The Dickensian allusions and references and all those lists ease you across the threshold into the past, but they are finally like the patina and 'wear' that Hobie and then Theo applies to the restored furniture. Hobie says, 'Patination is always one of the biggest problems in a piece. With new wood, if you're going for an effect of age, a gilded patina is always easiest to fudge. … Heavily restored pieces—where there are no worn bits or honorable scars, you have to hand out a few ancients and honorables yourself. The trick of it is never to be too nice

about it' (516). Hobie applies it honestly and fits new pieces with old pieces – for reclamation with maybe 'recombinative' intentions.[14] The restored cabinet is not absolutely the thing itself but can pass for it and retains the spirt of the thing. It is a new thing and an old thing at once – something sitting in the modern age but that has sleight of hand and clever cheats.

The changeling furniture also resembles the Fabritius painting of *The Goldfinch* in these sleights of hand. In the following passage, a mysterious stolen-art dealer and criminal fence named Horst says calls the painting 'the thing and not the thing' because it seems to be a simple example of *trompe l'oeil* – that artist's effort to 'deceive the eye'. But, on closer inspection, he seems to be making a joking commentary on this effort to deceive. Horst[15] calls *The Goldfinch* (the painting) 'a masterly riposte to the whole idea of *trompe l'oeil*'.

> Fabritius … he's making a pun on the genre. … Because in other passages of the work—the head? The Wing?—not creaturely or literal in the slightest, he takes the image apart very deliberately to show us how he painted it. … It's a joke, the Fabritius. It has a joke at its heart. … And that's what all the great masters do … Rembrandt, Velazquez. … They make jokes. They amuse themselves. They build up the illusion, the trick … but, step closer? It falls apart into brushstrokes. Abstract, unearthly. A different and … deeper sort of beauty altogether. … The Thing and not the thing. (721)

And, like the novel *The Goldfinch*, the painting itself is making a kind of 'joke' about its hybrid nature, and amusing itself while not being especially interested in being funny. It takes itself apart as we are putting it together. Hobie calls these hybrids pieces of old and new 'Changelings'.[16] Late in the book Theo applies the patina and recombinative techniques less honestly, with the intention of fooling customers. Tartt is more Hobie than Theo. She is fitting narrative pieces together (plot, description, narration) with near-Dickens (orphans, curiosity shops, characters named Pippa) and produces a beautiful object. It is just that the warmth and texture and 'spirit' of the Dickens novel is hard to reproduce. As Hobie puts it, 'the genuine pieces' are marked by how they are 'variable, crooked capricious, singing here and sullen there', marked by 'warm asymmetrical streaks on a rosewood cabinet from where a slant of sun had struck it while the other side was as dark as the day it was cut' (516). This novel, enjoyable as it is, is passably Dickensian in the dark shop, but in the bright light of the Las Vegas sun, where the sun hits it, it is a little less so. And this is perhaps what Tartt intends. It is a lovely changeling, but, as Hobie would say, it is 'epoxy-glued' in places. Still, the novel does become a means of time travel. What is lacking – the mixture of pathos and humour, the insistent charming narrator, the warmth, the texture, the 'crooked, capricious' lived moments – is, perhaps after all, inimitable. It is the thing and not the thing.

Endnotes

[1] Hobie, who is from upstate New York, is also inexplicably British- or perhaps Irish-sounding. He says 'strand' for beach, 'the local' for a favourite local restaurant, and the hard-to-pin-down 'in a bit of tip' for in a spot of trouble.

[2] If one does not pursue the 'off-rhyme' tangents, one-to-one character corollaries to *Great Expectations* might indicate that the heartless Kitsey is a stand-in for Estella; Platt Barbour is Bentley Drummle. Perhaps Lucius Reeves, who seeks to expose Theo's fakes and Theo *as* a fake, is some fully embodied form of Orlick or the Avenger – that character who seeks to unmask the protagonist's pretentions.

[3] The novel drops into these lists repeatedly. Here is a list of lists. We are told that the boy returns to the shop for: 'Three oddly absorbing afternoons a week, after school: labeling jars, mixing rabbit-skin glue, sorting through boxes of drawer fittings. … Amidst the drowsy tick of the tall-case clocks, [Hobie] taught me the pore and luster of different woods, their colors, the ripple and gloss of tiger maple and the frothed grain of burled walnut, their weights in my hand even their different scents … spicy mahogany, dusty-smelling oak, black cherry with its characteristic tag and the flowery, amber-resin smell of rosewood. Saws and counter-sinks, rasps and rifflers, bent blades and spoon blades, braces and mitre-blocks' (207). 'He sidestepped a book face down on the carpet and a tea-cup ringed with brown on the inside, and ushered me to an ornate chair, tucked and shirred, with fringe and a complicated button-studded seat—a Turkish chair. … Winged bronzes, silver trinkets, Dusty gray ostrich plumes in a sliver case' (153); There are 'Murky portraits, china spaniels on the mantelpiece, golden pendulum swinging, tockety-tock, tockety-tock' (156); 'He pushed open a door into a crowded kitchen with a ceiling skylight and a curvaceous old stove: tomato red, with svelte lines like a 1950s spaceship. Books stacked on the floor—cookbooks, dictionaries, old novels, encyclopedias; shelves closely packed with antique china in a half dozen patterns. Near the window, by the fire escape, a faded wooden saint held up a palm in benediction; on the sideboard alongside a silver tea set, painted animals straggled two by two into a Noah's Ark. But the sink was piled with dishes, and on the countertops and windowsills stood medicine bottles, dirty cups, alarming drifts of unopened mail, and plants from a florist's dry and brown in their pots' (161); 'Her fairytale books, her perfume bottles, her sparkly tray of barrettes and her valentine collection paper lace, cupids, and columbines, Edwardian suitors with rose bouquets pressed to their hearts' (482).

[4] For instance, 13-year-old Theo's suspension for bad behaviour at school is what puts Theo and his mum outside the Metropolitan Museum on a school day. His mum's momentary car sickness prompts them to exit a taxi on West 86th Street and Fifth Avenue, instead of nearer the school. Theo first

presses for breakfast at a Madison Avenue diner, but relents, and they wander towards the park down Fifth Avenue. Caught in a downpour with just a flimsy umbrella (just as the mother is thinking about 'time warps'), they just miss snagging another cab and are driven into the nearby museum. In the museum, Theo sees and follows Pippa, and is momentarily separated from his mother. A terrorist bomb kills her, spares him, and in the confused aftermath he takes the painting. Any one of these trivial events, if changed, would have changed the future. In *Time and Again*, Simon is told by one his handlers to disregard one scientist's worry about changing the future while visiting the past: 'Listen to him long enough and you'll think that if you sneezed too loud back in January 1882, you might somehow set off a chain of events that could blow up the world. But it wouldn't. … People don't … do anything else of any importance because of the routine trivial action of some stranger' (230). But *The Goldfinch* argues any small action might 'blow up the world'.

[5] In describing how the 'recombinative' process works, Davis writes, 'New media are forged from older media. For example, the visual tricks of magic lantern slides and the plots of melodramas were among the earliest influences in cinema. Likewise, modernist innovations in staging and playwriting are comprehensible in relation to older practices, traces in the recombinative use of staging techniques and narrative motifs for performance. Performance never breaks wholly from tradition but exists in reference and reconstitution of it' (13).

[6] See Gary Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon's 'On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and "Success"—Biologically,' *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory & Interpretation*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2007. Bortolotti and Hutcheon discuss first the second-class status of adaptations, and then propose a 'homology between biological and cultural adaptation. By homology we mean a similarity in structure that is indicative of a common origin: that is, both kinds of adaptation are understandable as processes of replication. Stories, in a manner parallel to genes, replicate; the adaptations of both evolve with changing environments. Our hope is that biological thinking may help move us beyond the theoretical impasses in narrative adaptation studies represented by the continuing dominance of what is usually referred to as "fidelity discourse"' (444). Fidelity discourse tends to 'judge an adaptation's "success" only in relation to its faithfulness or closeness to the "original" or "source" text threatens to reinforce the current low estimation of cultural capital) of what is, in fact, a common and persistent way humans have always told and retold stories'. Biology, on the other hand 'does not judge adaptations in terms of fidelity to the "original"; indeed, that is not the point at all. Biology can celebrate the diversity of life forms, yet at the same time recognise that they come from a common origin' (445). In this way, the Dickens novels Tartt borrows pieces from are 'ancestors' of the a wholly original novel called *The Goldfinch* rather than a source. Also, in

the novel, the antique furniture created by Hobie are not 'copies' of 'originals' so much as new forms with a variety of ancestors.

[7] *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen*. Michigan UP, 2002, p. 62.

[8] As an example of how the book uses nostalgia before the fact, consider this. Just before the explosion that kills his mother, when Theo sees red-haired Pippa; she is the proximate reason for his not following his mother (to her death). She also is an occasion to contemplate a shared movie-watching memory with his mother and an excuse to think about a famous passage on future regret from *Citizen Kane*. The famous 'red-haired girl' anecdote: 'Someday too I might be like the old man in the movie, leaning back in my chair with a far-off look in my eyes, and saying: "You know, that was sixty years ago, and I never saw that girl with the red hair again, but you know what? Not a month has gone by in all that time when I haven't thought of her,"' Theo remembers the elderly character Mr Bernstein in *Citizen Kane* saying (37). Then, boom. The explosion distracts the reader from how it odd it is for a little boy to be casting himself forward 60 years the way an old man casts himself 60 years back in a 60-year-old movie.

[9] Like melodrama, Dickens's use of pathos has famously gotten a bad name. But reclamation of both have been underway for a while, since melodrama often produces pathos. See the following for the work done on reclaiming 'Melodrama': Carolyn Williams' 'Melodrama.' *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, edited by Kate Flint. Cambridge UP, 2012, pp. 193–219. *The New Cambridge History of English Literature*; Peter Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination*. Yale UP, 1996; Tracy C. Davis's *Theatricality*. Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 1–39.

[10] Famously, Robert Garis, who writes of the 'Dickens Theater', sees theatricality as a sign of the failure of genuine emotion, respect for the 'inner life' of his characters, or genuine connection between text and reader. The connection, he says, is frustrated by the interposition of the narrator or 'artificer'. Garis cites the opening of *Little Dorrit* and concludes 'The prose is thick with artifice, which actually forces itself into our consciousness. Nor is there the slightest suggestion of an attempt to hide the presence of the artificer' (8). But John Glavin draws the opposite conclusion about theatricality, seeing it as a conduit of emotion (24, 31), and I am following Glavin here, where comedy and even the Garis 'artificer' is a means of connection with the audience.

[11] See for example *Humor: A Reader for Writers*, by Kathleen Volk-Miller and Marion Wrenn (Oxford UP, 2014); *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy* by Eric Weitz (Cambridge UP, 2009); *Comedy* in the New Critical Idiom Series, by Andrew Stott (Routledge, 2015); *Comedy: A Very Short Introduction* by Matthew Bevis (Oxford UP, 2013) and from Bloomsbury an ongoing project: a six-volume *Cultural History of Comedy*, edited by Andrew Stott. Still, serious novelists like Jonathan Franzen might say that he 'thinks of himself as a comic novelist' and tries to be funny on every page, but he is not reviewed that way, as if critics need serious novelists to be serious. 'Fresh

Air with Terry Gross.' Interview. 'Jonathan Franzen, on Writing: It's an Escape from Everything' NPR. 1 Sep. 2015. https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=436442184. Accessed 20 Nov. 2019.

[12] Edwin Eigner makes a parallel point about how sentimentality, like melodrama, pathos, and – I would add – comedy, has come to be viewed suspiciously – all seeming to be the enemy of sincerity. He begins by quoting Fred Kaplan, who writes, "'the notion of sentimentality as insincerity, as false feeling, even as hypocrisy," is a modern prejudice … and that "throughout the eighteenth-century and through much of the nineteenth, neither word [sentimental or sentimentality] had pejorative implication, except in special cases." Sentimentality, [Kaplan] explains was a thoroughly respectable emotion, sanctified by such important eighteenth-century moral philosophers as Adam Smith and David Hume, both of whom "believed that an access of feeling cannot be an excess of feeling…" Dickens, who inherited this belief from Goldsmith and others, never doubted the sincerity of sentimentalism.' (Eigner 38; Kaplan 17, 19–20).

[13] Playwright and filmmaker Kenneth Lonergan talks about how the comedy in his plays and films heightens the tragedy – and the intermingling reflects life. 'I've never seen there being a tremendous dividing line between comedy and tragedy,' Lonergan said at a question-and-answer session after *Manchester by the Sea* at the New York Film Festival, in October 2016. 'Even if it's the worst of the worst, it's not happening to everyone. It might just be happening to you, or to someone you know, while the rest of the world is going on doing things that are beautiful, or funny, or material, or practical' (Mead, Rebecca. *New Yorker*, 7 Nov. 2016).

[14] Thomas Leitch might call these recombinative 'changelings' 'homages' to the originals rather than copies or, borrowing from Kamilla Elliott, 'de(re) compositions' – where the new adaptations are 'composites' based on the 'de(re)composing concept' in which 'film and novel decompose, merge, and form a new composition' of the material and new added elements' (103).

[15] Horst himself is something of a 'changeling': an assemblage of various 1940s Hollywood *mitteleuropean* heavies (maybe Peter Lorrie, or nearly the entire supporting cast of *The Third Man*). Tartt uses the old-fashioned descriptive shorthand mentioned earlier: 'With his ripped jeans and combat boots, he was like a scuffed up version of some below-the-title Hollywood character actor from the 1940s, some minor *mittel-europäischer* known for playing tragic violinists and weary cultivated refugees' (716).

[16] The notion of 'changeling' is explained here: 'Hobie had been making these cannibalized and heavily altered pieces ("changelings" as he called them) for virtually his whole working life… I had admired Hobie's changelings for years and had even helped work on some of them, but it was the shock of being fooled by these previously unseen pieces that (to employ a favored phrase of Hobie's) filled me with a wild surmise. Every so often there passed through the shop a piece of museum quality too damaged or broken to save; for Hobie, who sorrowed over these elegant old remnants as if they were

unfed children or mistreated cats, it was a point of duty to rescue what he could (a pair of finials here, a set of finely turned legs there) and then with his gifts as carpenter and joiner to recombine them into beautiful young Frankensteins that were in some cases plainly fanciful but in others such faithful models of the period that they were all but indistinguishable from the real thing.' (561)

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CHAPTER 7

Little Nell in the Cyber Age

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Neal Stephenson's ambitious science fiction book *The Diamond Age* is an unusual and complex ensemble of post-cyberpunk sci-fi concepts,[1] Confucian theories, dystopic scenarios, and Victorian, more specifically Dickensian, structure and influences. Stephenson's book has in fact been defined as 'an ambitious Dickensian work of science-fiction' (*The Complete Review*), a kind of '*Great Expectations* with nanotechnology', or, even more significantly,

> If one can conceptualize the marriage of Dickensian structure and underlying pauper to princess themed plot to that of a cyber-oriented, globally identifying world of nanotechnology, the materialization would mirror the world created by Neal Stephenson in *The Diamond Age*. (Kelley n.pag.)

Complementing the approaches to the 'Dickensian' in Chapter 6, which explored the role of humour, and Chapter 8, which centres on Dickensian realism, this chapter will explore the peculiar articulation of Dickensian literary inspirations, from a more superficial structural level of narration to an elaborated and rich grade of conceptual developments. Owing to the intricacies and complexities of the novel's plot and setting, a preliminary summary is necessary in order to understand the following investigation.

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The story takes place in a not-so-far away future, in a post-nation Shanghai and its surroundings, where the population is divided into *phyles*, or tribes, gaining their respective power and relevance from powerful nanotechnology. The *phyles* have replaced nations; people are instead grouped together according to common shared values and cultures, while historical backgrounds are no longer important in the definition of identity. There are hundreds of different tribes, but the dominant ones are New Atlantis (or the Neo-Victorians), Nippon (the Japanese tribe), and the Han Chinese tribe, which is divided between the Confucian Celestial Kingdom and the more Western Coastal Republic. The so-called *thetes* are the tribeless, the poorest people at the bottom of the social ladder. Another two groups are worth mentioning, although more enigmatic and not officially recognised: the CrypNet and the Drummers, whose subversive role is connected to the development of a technology alternative to the dominant one controlled by New Atlantis. The CEP (Common Economic Protocol) is an inter-tribe organ with the purpose of guaranteeing political and economic equality between *phyles*.

In Stephenson's futuristic scenario, nanotechnology has evolved in such a pervasive way as to form the basis of the economic system and of ideologies and beliefs as well: as Rafael Miranda Huereca writes, 'the uses of nanotechnology then range from health care to bio-politics and mind control. In *The Diamond Age*, nanotechnology is responsible for the propagation of capitalistic ideologies, consumerism, tribal ethics and bio-politics' (50–1). The book's title refers to the new technology's capability of easily assembling diamond-like structures:

> In diamond, then, a dense network of strong bonds creates a strong, light, and stiff material. Indeed, just as we named the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and the Steel Age after the materials that humans could make, we might call the new technological epoch we are entering the Diamond Age.[2] (Merkle 25)

Nanotechnology in *The Diamond Age* makes it possible for everyone to be equipped with an MC (matter compiler), from which a wide range of goods can be artificially created. MCs depend for their existence on the Feed, a sort of electric grid which breaks raw materials into atoms and conveys them to the matter compilers to create new things. In turn, the Feed takes its power from the Source, a molecule disassembly line which provides it with a stream of recycled molecules. The control of the Source (which is also called Source Victoria) rests in the hands of New Atlantis, making it the most dominant and potent *phyle*.

Although the plot of the novel is extremely convoluted and elaborate, for the purpose of this chapter it is sufficient to give a brief summary. The main character is, arguably, the Primer (the novel's complete title is *The Diamond Age: Or, A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer*), a virtual interactive book created to be the

instrument of intellectual and moral development of a young Neo-Victorian girl. All the different characters and vicissitudes presented in *The Diamond Age* gain their respective relevance in the plot according to their relationship with the Primer. Nell, a little *thete* girl whose growing up and complex evolution is the main line of the narrative, comes to be in possession of a copy of the Primer, determining all her subsequent experiences and adventures. Thanks to the Primer's help, Nell escapes her degraded social surroundings and becomes a highly educated young Neo-Victorian. However, her striving for independence and autonomous thinking leads her away from the 'Vickys' (a nickname for the members of the New Atlantis *phyle*) too, and catapults her into the middle of a revolution, where she finds herself as a leader. Stephenson's book can be called a *Bildungsroman*, which is also what the Primer itself is, a book on personal development which *enacts* personal development – and it does it through storytelling. A complex series of *mise en abymes*, touching the meaning and powerfulness of literature itself, is at play here, as I shall explore in this chapter.

John Percival Hackworth is the nanotech engineer who creates the Primer and who is subsequently involved in all its consequences and developments: first he serves a Neo-Victorian equity lord who commissions the Primer, then he works as a double-agent for the Celestial Kingdom, which has its own interest in the Primer; he is also a character in the Primer itself and, eventually, he becomes the promoter of the Seed, the technology which is meant to overcome New Atlantis's Feed. His picaresque quest for the mysterious Alchemist (which is forced upon him by Dr X, a member of the Celestial Kingdom) reveals itself to be an Oedipal one: Hackworth discovers that *he* is the Alchemist himself. Miranda is the ractor (actor in interactive and virtual realities) who reads and interprets the Primer for Nell and who, through this, begins to feel a motherly attachment for the little girl, which eventually leads her to embark on her own personal expedition to find Nell. This pursuit, in turn, results in Miranda joining the Drummers, the mysterious underwater community developing the Seed, which Hackworth too has joined.

Another important figure in *The Diamond Age* is the Neo-Victorian equity lord Alexander Chung-Sik Finkle-McGraw, the one who commissions the creation of the Primer, having in mind the purpose of educating his granddaughter to question the status quo, with the only-apparently paradoxical purpose of reinforcing the status quo itself: the Neo-Victorian society, in Lord Chung-Sik Finkle-McGraw's eyes, is experiencing an intellectual stagnation that only an education meant to foster criticism and independent thinking can change. Among the numerous other characters populating *The Diamond Age*, I would like to mention just two others: Elizabeth Finkle-McGraw, the equity lord's granddaughter and original recipient of the Primer, and Fiona Hackworth, John Percival's daughter, for whose benefit the engineer steals a copy of the Primer.

Hence, Nell, Elizabeth, and Fiona are the three girls whose experience with the Primer deeply influences their upbringings. As Sherryl Vint points out,

'although each girl starts out with an identical database of cultural information, the stories that the Primer tells them are different because their social circumstances are different' (141). The Primer adapts its storytelling and its content to each little girl's different surroundings and cultural and social situation. Owing to her specific difficult circumstances, the Primer has a bigger influence on Nell than on the other two girls, becoming for the *thete* girl a veritable survival tool, teaching her to recognise danger and to fight it. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the Primer's teachings are different for each of the three girls, and different from what Lord Finkle-McGraw had in mind with its creation. Thus, the somehow extreme personality traits of Elizabeth make her interaction with the Primer the initial source of the rejection of the Neo-Victorian values the Primer was supposed to reinforce. Elizabeth chooses rebellion and joins the subversive CrypNet *phyle*. Fiona's melancholic and dreamy nature causes her to use the Primer as a way to escape reality and to be in touch with its creator, her missing father. Eventually, Fiona becomes a member of Dramatis Personae, a sort of unusual participatory theatre with surreal features.

Dickens and *The Diamond Age*: transparency, contradictions, zig-zagging paths, and powerful women

As the short summary above might suggest, *The Diamond Age* is a multifarious work, with multiple diverse influences and topics. Nonetheless, among the sources of inspiration, Dickens and a peculiarly Dickensian Victorian culture can be considered one of the most pervasive. Furthermore, reading the book with a Dickensian viewpoint helps to give a better grasp of its convoluted ramifications, and the parallels with Dickensian works give an illuminating perspective. This comparison works also as a further proof of the far-reaching power of Dickens's works. As Chapter 6 and Chapter 8 of this volume further show, the feature of *being Dickensian* can encompass different narrative elements, from plot structure (see what Jacklosky says about *The Goldfinch*'s narrative construction) to character description and building up (see again the discussion on characterisation in *The Goldfinch*, Chapter 6). Furthermore, as Laurena Tsudama highlights in Chapter 8, 'Dickensian Realism in *The Wire*', the meaning of Dickensian itself can be discussed, enlarged, and seen with different theoretical lights. I will proceed now in showing the peculiar ways in which *The Diamond Age* translates this multifaceted term 'Dickensian'.

First, the title. As discussed, it refers to the scientific manipulation of atoms and creation of *diamondoid* structures made possible by nanotechnology. However, diamond can also be thought of as the perfected version of glass and crystal: 19th-century Victorian England was deeply embedded with a 'mythography of glass' (Armstrong 204) that came to be seen as a 'glass culture'.[3] The Crystal Palace of the Great Exhibition worked as a symbol of this 'poetics of transparency': 'the gleam and lustre of glass surfaces, reflecting and refracting

the world, created a new glass consciousness and a language of transparency. The glass fountain at the Crystal Palace epitomized this environment and drew out a poetics of glass' (Armstrong 1). Stephenson creates a neo-Victorian environment where the past is transposed into the future with the eyes of the present (Brigg), and his reference to diamond is a metaphor for this transposition. In other words, the diamond material, as seen through contemporary scientific speculations and as metaphorically associated with the 19th-century Victorian glass culture, epitomises the peculiar encounter of nanotechnology and Dickensian scenarios realised in Stephenson's book.

Furthermore, Dickens himself was concerned with the problematic side effects of glass culture, whose most powerful symbol and expression was the Great Exhibition. Armstrong emphasises how *Bleak House* is an 'anti-Exhibition novel' (246), dealing with the inner contradictions and more sinister aspects of the Victorian glassworld, and showing how in it 'epiphenomena of glass is everywhere' (247): from the omnipresence of fog and the satirical counterpart of glass's transparency to the frequent use of description of windows and reflections, to the recurrence of Exhibition motifs (247–50). Armstrong highlights how the grotesque can be an offspring of the self-exaltation and excesses of the Victorian glass culture (250–1) and how Dickens exploits grotesque-related narrative devices to analyse and criticise this culture. She writes,

> the Grotesque, offspring of glass culture, makes room for thought by seizing contradictions and confronting them. The implicit question … is whether the Grotesque imagination is sufficiently creative to make room for thought and deal with contradiction. (250)

This problematic is taken up and expanded in *The Diamond Age*. The potential danger of Victorian glass culture has completely realised itself in the Neo-Victorian diamond reality: technology-related excesses and risks, amplification of the economical discrepancy between rich and poor, elimination of boundaries between materials and species, the presence inside the bosom of the society of insoluble contradictions. It is the proposed way of dealing with contradictions which is different: Dickens proposes the stylistic use of the grotesque imagination to convey a criticism of these contradictions, while in *The Diamond Age* the final, complex solution Nell reaches is *to embrace* contradictions. I shall come back to this pervasive and fundamental topic.

Moving from the title and its semantic ramifications, we can now consider how Stephenson's novel is formally constructed as a typical Dickens novel, giving descriptive headings at the beginning of each chapter to summarise the content. The writing style, too, is a certain kind of Dickensian that speaks to the elements discussed by Rob Jacklosky in Chapter 6: long paragraphs, elegant and formal prose, detailed descriptions, alternating with more crude representations of violent scenes, indulging in the depiction of cruelty and moral abomination (especially with reference to the domestic abuse Nell experiences as a

little child). For example, for one chapter we get the following headings: 'more tales from the Primer', 'the story of Dinosaur and Dojo', 'Nell learns a thing or two about the art of self-defense', 'Nell's mother gets, and loses, a worthy suitor', and 'Nell asserts her position against a young bully' (Stephenson 181), while the alternation between descriptive, elegant style and explicitly brutish and grotesque images can be seen in this paragraph:

> One day the Shanghai Police had come to arrest Tony, and he had plugged one of them right in the living room with his skull gun, blowing a hole in the guy's stomach so that intestines fell out and trailed down between his legs. The other policemen nailed Tony with a Seven Minute Special and then dragged their wounded comrade out into the hallway, while Tony, bellowing like a cornered, rabid animal, ran into the kitchen and grabbed a knife and began hacking at his chest where he thought the Seven Minute Special had gone into his body. … They bonded four handles onto the shrink-wrap and then carried him out between them, leaving Nell to clean up the blood in the kitchen and the living room… . (Stephenson 184–5)

Another important Dickensian echo is an obvious one: the main character's name, Nell, which is taken from the Little Nell of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Stephenson's equivalent to Nell's grandfather is Constable Moor, a retired soldier and constable of the Dovetail community, the Neo-Victorian environment where Nell stays after having run away from home. He offers Nell guidance and support, and looks after her during her years in the Neo-Victorian school until she completes her education and becomes a young woman. He is the only adult, apart from Miranda, who really helps and loves Nell. Their relationship and vicissitudes, however, differ from their Dickensian counterparts: Constable Moor at some point realises he has to let Nell go and grow up, and that he cannot constantly look after her, while Nell, although caring for him, decides to leave and find her own independent path, and appears as a more problematic character than the angelic Nell Trent. While Nell Trent's journey exhausts her and leads her to her well-known tragic premature death, Nellodee's (the complete name of Stephenson's character) journey reinforces her personality and her strength, and produces a starkly different outcome.

Lastly, *The Diamond Age* mimics Dickensian novels in the way the plot is constructed. There are several different parallel plot lines, with the goal of gradually revealing the various interconnections and bringing the main characters together. This structural pattern is typical of Dickens's works, from *Oliver Twist* to *Great Expectations* or *Nicholas Nickleby*: novels where the process of *denouement* progressively disentangles the plot's knots, arriving by degrees at the final revelations and conclusions. What Orwell calls 'the crossword puzzle of coincidences' (305) in Dickens's main works is recreated in *The Diamond Age*, where the stories of Nell, Hackworth, Harv (Nell's brother), Lord Finkle-McGraw,

Miranda, Fiona, Elizabeth, Carl Hollywood (Miranda's employer), Dr X, and Judge Fang start and diverge in different directions, then intersect and in the end unite.

However, while the Dickensian scenarios are held together by a teleological purpose, a *shape* which superimposes a form to the plot's events and which makes possible for the different complex ramifications to come to a complete resolution, in *The Diamond Age* Stephenson is more prone to recognise the final absence of a precise, clear order, acknowledging the force of chaos which post-modern narratives celebrate. Edgecombe recognises that 'even as, over time, this 'geometry' imposed its patterns on plot construction – all the time with our willing collusion – contingency lapped at the edges, and eventually broke a few dykes during the rise of realism' (174), and this is particularly evident in Dickens's later works, but the strong pull of happy coincidence and conventional endings is enacted throughout his *oeuvre* and has come to be associated with the Victorian novel itself. *The Diamond Age*, on the other hand, follows this orderly structure until the last chapters. Here, it seems that Stephenson loses control of his own plot development. The end is actually not clear at all and it is not even a proper resolution: what will happen to Miranda, after Nell has saved her from the Drummers? And will the Drummers be able to fully develop the Seed? And is the Seed a good thing or not? What will Nell and her army of Chinese girls do? What will Nell's next step be? All (and more) of these questions remain unanswered. The 'linear narrative' (Edgecombe 174), with all the ramifications shown in a clear, final resolution, gets lost in *The Diamond Age*'s conclusion. This is in line with Stephenson's message, and with the other discrepancies present in *The Diamond Age*. This conceptual pattern, formally visible in the final deviance to Dickens's ordered model, is rendered most clearly in the following passage:

> there was a Chinese belief that demons liked to travel only in straight lines. Hence the bridge zigzagged no fewer than nine times … from the point of view of some people, including Dr X, all of that straightness was suggestive of demonism; more natural and human was the ever-turning way, where you could never see round the next corner… . (Stephenson 127)

Victorians and Neo-Victorians

The social structure depicted by Stephenson places 'Vickys' at the top, the Neo-Victorians of New Atlantis, who control most of the nanotechnology resources and who consider themselves as having inherited and perfected the original 19th-century Victorian values. This is a rather unsubtle nod to 20th- and 21st-century views of what it meant to be 'Victorian': when Hackworth is asked by Lord Finkle-McGraw why he joined the New Atlantis *phyle*, he replies that his

own life experiences and historical studies led him 'to the conclusion that there was little in the previous century worthy of emulation, and that we must look to the nineteenth century instead for stable social models' (Stephenson 24). Charles Rubin notes that 'the rise of New Atlantis is presented explicitly as a reaction against the moral relativism and mindless egalitarianism of the late twentieth century, just as the original Victorians turned against Regency-era excesses' (137). Strict moral rules, class divisions, special attention to education, impeccable manners, and self-confidence are all features which distinguish the Neo-Victorians. What appears clear from the progression of the narrative is that the Vickys also inherited the flaws and contradictions characterising the original Victorian era, worsening and emphasising them. As Brigg recognises,

> while nanotechnology may allow the fobs on gentlemen's watch-chains to be devices that receive e-mail, the New Victorians retain the pomposity, excessive displays of manners, debilitating moral inflexibility, and blindness to their own faults for which we castigate the original Victorians… . (120)

It is well-known how Dickens used his literary influence to highlight the social issues and the problems of his times, resulting in a powerful social critique realised throughout his novels – also with the potential for unanticipated, long-lasting impact, as emphasised by Joanna Hofer-Robinson in Chapter 1. The dark sides of the Industrial Revolution and of rapid urbanisation, as well as the miserable conditions of the working class and the abuses suffered by orphans and poor women, are all topics Dickens deals with in many of his novels. *Oliver Twist* is an obvious example; its passages about the ill-treatment of children in workhouses having become among the most quoted sentences on the topic of Victorian England's social degradation and, as shown in Chapter 1, invoked in changing the very landscape of London. The scene of Oliver asking for more soup is 'the most familiar incident in any English novel' (Sanders, 412), and the motif of child abuse comes back in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *David Copperfield*, among others. This topic is taken up in *The Diamond Age*, where, just outside the luxurious world of the rich Neo-Victorians, little Nell and her brother, Harv, are invisible to any kind of social support, do not have access to a proper education, and are constantly beaten and abused by their mother's different boyfriends. Harv's whereabouts with his gang of little thieves echo the group of pickpocketing children led by the Artful Dodger in *Oliver Twist*.

Dickens realises an even more complete and detailed depiction of the inequalities and injustice in Victorian England in *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*. These novels explore a broken legal system, the deficiencies of health care, the lack of education for the poor, and overcrowded housing in the poorest areas of big cities. Descriptions of dark, foggy, dirty places abound. *The Diamond Age* gives equal attention to the problematics of the nano era, and the Leased Territories, where Nell originally lives, look a lot like the London slums of Dickens: for

instance, 'it was always foggy in the Leased Territories, because all of the immunocules in the air served as nuclei for condensation of water vapor' (Stephenson 59). The fog, Dickens's most significant and widespread symbol to signify the side effects of industrial London, functions in a similar way in Stephenson's Leased Territories, where it is connected to the presence of 'an aerial buffer zone infested with immunocules', meant to be defensive tools for the rich New Atlantis area but damaging at the same time the health and living conditions of the tribeless people inhabiting that space. The buildings in the Leased Territories have all turned black because of the 'cineritious corpses of airborne mites' (Stephenson 333) and the same process affects the lungs of people living there: Nell's brother, Harv, finishes his days in a hospital, attached to a machine supplying him purified air, and 'his body was bloated, his face round and heavy, his fingers swollen to puffy cylinders; they had been giving him heavy steroid treatments' (333).

On the other hand, the rich Victorians live completely unaware and untouched by the conditions of the *thete* people, the immense discrepancy between the two groups being further emphasised by the scene where we see Nell, grown up as a proper Neo-Victorian lady, visiting the Leased Territories to see her dying brother. She is riding a chevaline (a robotic horse), her outfit is impeccable, and she is wearing a special veil, 'a field of microscopic, umbrella-like aerostats programmed to fly in a sheet formation a few inches in front of Nell's face' (Stephenson 331), to protect her from the eyes of *thete* men and from the harmful nanosites which have ruined Harv's health. Her way of speaking is polished and refined, while Harv's is vernacular and sometimes gross; she is beautiful and healthy, while he is physically deformed and extremely ill. Their meeting is tragic; the two have nothing in common anymore, and Nell's visits look like a pitiful gesture towards a person who has become estranged to her. Nevertheless, they still love each other, and Harv's last words during his meeting with Nell are warm declarations of affection, while Nell cannot control her tears. This disparity between them, accompanied nevertheless by sincere affection and good feelings, evoke the relationship between Pip and Joe in *Great Expectations*, even though Joe's destiny is less harsh and cruel than Harv's.

Despite the different chronological settings, there are significant similarities between the culture of the Victorians of the 19th century and the Neo-Victorians of *The Diamond Age*: their offspring, caused by a previous moral relativism, their focus on manners and proper education, their pride and sense of superiority, their dominance over other cultures, their partial blindness towards the conditions of the poor. What clearly emerges from the post-cyberpunk reinterpretation of Victorian customs is the insolvable presence of deep, embedded contradictions. Lord Finkle-McGraw sees these contradictions but claims the Neo-Victorians' superiority over the originals: if in the 19th century moral stances were often found guilty of hypocrisy, covering up wicked behaviours, the New Victorians' goal is trying to acknowledge this hypocrisy and working on overcoming it. In Lord Finkle-McGraw's own words,

> No one ever said that it was easy to hew to a strict code of conduct. Really, the difficulties involved – the missteps we make along the way – are what makes it interesting. The internal, and *eternal*, struggle, between our base impulses and the rigorous demands of our own moral system is quintessentially human. It is how we conduct ourselves in that struggle that determines how we may in time be judged by a higher power. (Stephenson 191)

The Primer is supposed to be an educational tool meant to promote a positive outcome to this struggle, but what Finkle-McGraw is not able to predict is the real impact of this positive outcome: the actualisation of a sincerer code of morality is going to provoke revolt against the New Atlantis *phyle* itself. The violent rebellion which did not happen in the old British Victorian Age comes to life in the futuristic Neo-Victorian scenario.

Nell

The construction of the various levels of society in *The Diamond Age* reveals a playful approach to stereotypes of the Victorians that emphasises contradiction, and the character of Nell is similarly imbued with Dickensian conflict. These Dickensian connections are used to function both as inspirational traits and also as conflicting elements, making Nell a puzzling creature, half Dickensian and half post-cyberpunk heroine.[4] At the beginning, Nell is more Dickensian in the sense rejected by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, as discussed in Chapter 2, or as emphasised in the completions of *Drood* that do not permit Rosa Bud to evolve, as explored in Chapter 5; she is naïve, innocent, and abused and her brother, Harv, is protecting her. Men dominate Nell, her mother's boyfriends abusing and beating her, and Harv playing the role of her bodyguard. The arrival of the Primer in Nell's hands is the beginning of a turning point: inspired and encouraged by it, Nell rebels against the violent Burt, hurting him with a screwdriver and persuading her brother to run away from their house for good. When Nell begins her new life as a Vicky, Harv, because of his turbulent past as a little criminal, is banished from the Victorian *phyle* and has to go back to the Leased Territories. This dialogue between Judge Chang and his magistrates, speaking about Nell and Harv, is meaningful:

> 'Is the boy rotten wood? His father certainly was. I am not certain about the boy, yet.'
>
> 'With utmost respect, I would direct your attention to the girl,' said Chang, 'who should be the true subject of our discussions. The boy may be lost; the girl can be saved.' (Stephenson 104)

Hence, Nell has to get rid of the men surrounding her, both negative and positive ones, in order to embark in her own personal improvement. The last male

protector is the Constable, whom, as discussed, Nell also has to leave behind. This focus on a woman who not only does not need men (even her suitors are all rejected) but is also much better without them, is certainly a less Dickensian development, and in *The Diamond Age* 'the female circles, apparently free from class struggle and ferocious ambitions, focus rather on socially concerned programs, spiritual labor and mutual care' (Miranda Huereca 108) as opposed to the brutal, scheming, or both, nature of most of the novel's male characters.[5]

However, even if during the course of her story Nell distances herself from a weaker Dickensian female character, she still retains other features which associate her with characters from Dickens's works. Just as Oliver Twist retains his goodness in spite of the machinations of Fagin, Monks, and Sikes, a similar process occurs to Stephenson's Nell: the abuses inflicted on her during her childhood do not modify her good nature and kindness, and the long stay among the Vickys does not make her snobbish and proud. In what follows, Nell works in a brothel (as a writer of ractives – interactive sexual performances) but she does not lose her elegance and composure; then she is kidnapped, beaten, and raped, and still she remains good, equal, and balanced. Both Oliver and Nell's terrible vicissitudes fail to have a negative influence on the strong, perennial inner goodness of the two children. This is perhaps a kind of rewriting of the 'fallen woman' that *Oliver Twist*'s Nancy represents: Dickens's controversial representation of a prostitute as a force for good in that text haunts the shadow of Nell, who is able to overcome it.

Another parallel which can be drawn between Nell's character development and Dickensian scenarios is in respect to her social evolution. Pip from *Great Expectations* offers here the optimal comparison. Pip experiences the typically Victorian rags-to-riches theme, going from the life of a poor orphan working in a forge to the luxurious existence of a Victorian gentleman. Both Nell and Pip have to 'learn to perform a whole new identity' (Bowen n.pag.), different ways of dressing, speaking, behaving, eating. However, neither achieves a complete identification with the new social status. Pip is constantly haunted by his past as a poor orphan, and in the end the discovery of who really was his true benefactor further undermines his certainties: as Bowen states, 'as his 'criminal' past appears in the present in the shape of Magwitch, he is almost destroyed by the discovery, and his whole sense of self is simultaneously tainted and emptied out'. Nell too remains an outsider, despite her perfect Neo-Victorian education and appearance; when she is leaving the posh Academy for Neo-Victorian girls where she has been educated, Miss Matheson, the head teacher of the Academy, tells Nell something significant in this respect:

> 'Your destiny is marked in some way, Nell. I have known it since the day Lord Finkle-McGraw came to me and asked me to admit you – a ragged little thete girl – into my Academy. You can try to act the same – we have tried to make you the same – you can pretend it in the future if you insist, and you can even take the Oath – but it's all a lie. You are different.' (Stephenson 353)

At first Miss Matheson's words may seem to depict a scenario where Nell's status as an outsider would mean isolation and lack of a solid identity, as in Pip's case. Yet the rest of the dialogue between Nell and Miss Matheson tells a different story:

> 'Are you suggesting that I leave the bosom of the adopted tribe that has nurtured me?'
>
> 'I am suggesting that you are one of those rare people who transcends tribes… .' (Stephenson 354)

This is the main, fundamental difference between Pip and Nell. The fluctuation from the bottom to the top of the Victorian social pyramid does not give Pip any real sense of stability; it simply destroys his naivety and makes him feel perennially lost and out of place. Dickens does not offer any solution to this: the peasant life of Joe and Biddy turns out to be more idyllic and sincere than the luxurious life of a London gentleman, but for an in-between character like Pip there is no peace in either of the two dimensions. The Cinderella myth is shown by Dickens with all its possible flaws, but no solution is offered. On the other hand, Nell finds that, despite the difficulties and loneliness often connected to it, the uncertain and indefinable nature of her condition is precisely its strength: it is only outside the stability and comfort of a fixed social status that all the potentiality of one's personality can be truly realised. Embracing contradictions is what Nell chooses to do, and her last dialogue with Constable Moor, before departing towards the outside China, shows her complex and amplified perspective:

> 'Which path do you intend to take, Nell?' said the Constable, sounding very interested. 'Conformity or rebellion?'
>
> 'Neither one. Both ways are simple-minded – they are only for people who cannot cope with contradiction and ambiguity.' (Stephenson 356)

Nell thus does not need a tribe to have her identity defined, nor does she need to embrace a black or white view of the world by choosing one of the two extremes, rebelling or conforming. If the old Victorian era was an age of contradictions and complexities, the Neo-Victorian period has even more complications and paradoxes, created by a more powerful technology and an extremely complex social and historical background. But the presence of more contradictions in some sense allows for more ramifications and possibilities: with the character of Nell, Stephenson does not offer a specific, always valuable, solution, but he shows what attitude can bring positive outcomes. And it is precisely Nell's status as an outsider, the same status which in Pip's case provokes his negative lack of identity, which in the context of *The Diamond Age* makes her the ideal person to find a way to navigate the difficulties of her time – her own personal contradictions mirroring those of the outside world.

The power of fairy tales, literature, and education

The central element of Stephenson's novel is the Young Lady's Illustrated Primer. As mentioned, Lord Finkle-McGraw requires its creation from nanotech engineer Hackworth as an educational tool for his granddaughter Elizabeth. It accidentally falls into the hands of little Nell, changing the course of her life, and a copy is also used by Hackworth's daughter Fiona. The original purpose behind its creation is Lord Finkle-McGraw's intention of refreshing the cultural stagnation of his *phyle* by promoting a more critical and independent perspective, but its actual effects go beyond Finkle-McGraw's predictions. The basic and fundamental assumption behind the Primer's role is the Jungian idea that 'in myths and fairy tales, as in dreams, the psyche tells its own story' – considering the psyche as both a cultural and social phenomenon and a personal, individual one. The Primer constructs its stories based on the cultural and social surroundings of the little girl it comes in contact with, but also on the specific nature of the girl herself. As Rubin summarises,

> Hackworth explains to Finkle-McGraw that children's stories have always mapped universals onto the specific characters prized or objected to in a given culture. The *Primer* takes the next step by doing so in relationship to its owner's particular circumstances, using highly sophisticated surveillance of its surroundings, so that it incorporates information collected about its owner into its stories. (137)

In Nell's case, then, the Primer begins with the story of Princess Nell, trapped in a tall, dark castle from which she needs to escape, and of her companions: her protector Harv and her four friends Dinosaur, Peter Rabbit, Duck, and Purple (Nell's four stuffed animals). Following Nell's growing up, the Primer evolves from the structure of a basic fairy tale to a more complex and elaborated narration, where Nell undergoes more cryptic and intricate challenges, like when she finds herself in Castle Turing and has to figure out the mechanisms of increasingly complicated Turing machines. The Primer mirrors Nell's situation from different perspectives: social, cultural, practical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual. 'The Primer simulacra make use of inter-texts, collages, pastiches, mythologies, narratives and quotes that compel the users to re-arrange all of these elements into new personal, meaningful structures' (Miranda Huereca 138): the education provided by the Primer fosters awareness, critical thinking, and intellectual development.

Even if the Primer is a complex virtual tool made possible by sophisticated nanotechnologies, it has the appearance of a beautiful 19th-century book and the goal of re-enacting a 19th-century approach to the importance of education. McGinnis highlights that 'Stephenson's decision to center his novel around girls reading books is another way in which he sets the novel in dialogue with the Victorian past' (483); education came to be at the centre of debates in the

Victorian age, and there were different conflicting opinions about what children should read (and also about what *women* should read). Dickens is again a crucial reference here: he pointed out several times the relevance and necessity of a more widespread education,[6] and his books meant to educate, and to do so also through the means of re-elaborating myths and fairy-tale motifs. As several studies have shown (to name a few: Harry Stone's *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Novel-Making*; *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale* by Elaine Ostry; and *The Fairy Tale Literature of Charles Dickens, George MacDonald and Christina Rossetti* by Cynthia DeMarcus Manson), Dickens exploits fairy-tale elements, integrating and developing them in his novels (we have already considered how he used the Cinderella myth, for instance). Hence, both Dickens's books and Stephenson's Primer recognise the primary importance of working with fairy tales as educational maps: mythological narratives deeply embedded in mental archetypes are the raw materials utilised to construct a powerful method of education through literature. In *Dombey and Son* Dickens writes about the teaching method of Mrs Pipchin that it was 'a part of Mrs. Pipchin's system not to encourage a child's mind to develop and expand itself like a young flower, but to open it by force like an oyster' (8), implying that the opposite should be the case: the gradual developing and expanding of the mind like petals of a blossoming bud, which is the approach promoted by Nell's Primer.

However, the Primer is not infallible, and the outcomes of education are not always predictable. As Lord Finkle-McGraw explains,

> To make a long story short, the three girls have turned out differently. Elizabeth is rebellious and high-spirited and lost interest in the primer several years ago. Fiona is bright but depressed, a classic manic-depressive artist. Nell, on the other hand, is a most promising young lady… . (Stephenson 367)

The reasons behind these different results are several, but what Finkle-McGraw has to acknowledge (and the same happens with Hackworth) is that, despite intentions, trying to control the educational device he has decided to create is impossible and would mean the failure of that same device. The Primer cannot boost subversion if the same subversion cannot be directed against the Primer itself. Nell understands the limits of the Primer when she manages to fully realise the fundamental relevance of individual creativity and personal experience. Her own reflections are as follows:

> Princess Nell's recent travels through the lands of King Coyote, and the various castles with their increasingly sophisticated computers that were, in the end, nothing more than Turing machines, had caught her up in a bewildering logical circle. In Castle Turing she had learned that a Turing machine could not really understand a human being. But the

> Primer was, itself, a Turing machine, or so she suspected; so how could it understand Nell? (Stephenson 403)

The Primer can understand Nell because of Miranda, who reads it for her, and who has formed a sincere motherly affection towards her. The tool itself, with all its elaborated system, could not operate without the presence of a real personal experience and a real personal relationship.

Dickens faced the same sort of difficulties: Victorian readership was becoming vast and anonymous, due to increasingly efficient printing systems and the diffusion of literacy, making the direct link between authors and readers much less immediate. In this sense, the necessary strong relationship with readers was undermined by these factors, and Dickens fought against it by devising specific writing strategies which created his own persona as the ideal author, and his own readers as sort of 'ideal readers', that he could construct and lead.[7] What Dickens aimed to build was what Valerie Purton defines as his 'tight authorial embrace' (120). On the one hand, it can be said that Dickens would perfectly understand what the presence of Miranda means for Nell and her education: the need of some sort of human connection and relationship in order to make teachings more effective. On the other hand, he is guilty of the same mistake Lord Finkle-McGraw commits: the desire of directing his readers where he wants them to go. A famous letter he sent to Catherine Dickens is worth quoting here: after having parts of his works read aloud to a group of friends, as it had become his custom to do in order to study the readers' response to his narratives, he wrote to Catherine 'If you had seen Macready last night – un-disguisedly sobbing, and crying on the sofa, as I read – you would have felt (as I did) what a thing it is to have Power' (*Letters* 4:235). The power of the Primer has to be dissolved in order for Nell to become really independent and really subversive. 'The gap between her experience and the Primer allows her to gain a critical perspective on the Primer's advice, the space for agency and resistance comes from this doubling of perspective' (Vint 164), and Nell's final victory is against Hackworth himself (and, consequently, Finkle-McGraw as well), the creator of the Primer, who gives her the keys to the Primer itself. By having the book be the central character of his novel and subverting the power of that book, Stephenson does something emphatically un-Dickensian. Nonetheless, it can be argued that what happens to Finkle-McGraw's Primer, meant to strengthen his Neo-Victorian social tribe and actually ending up in promoting effective subversion against it, is, to some extent, what happened to Dickens's novels too, which have been read and used as means to promote revolutionary thinking by Marxist readers, Egyptian revolutionaries, and more, going in this way far beyond Dickens's original purpose as the Primer goes against Finkle-McGraw's purpose of promoting criticism and awareness but not real, violent subversion against the status quo.

I hope to have given an introduction to Stephenson's fascinating book *The Diamond Age*, by highlighting an essential part of its meaning and construction:

its relationship with the Dickensian heritage. Many elements from Dickens's novels are to be found in the text, from the more formal aspects such as style and headings to the main character's name. The content, too, interacts with the idea of the Dickensian also explored in Chapters 6 and 8 of this volume, drawing on scenarios, characterisation, and narrative techniques found in Dickens's works, from the depiction and criticism of the Neo-Victorian society, modelled on a Victorian one, to the emphasis placed on the importance of literature and education. Finally, Dickens's own restricted perspective on books and education is overcome in the alternative solutions proposed by *The Diamond Age* that push the reader to find power in themselves, not in the books they read.

Endnotes

[1] An accurate study of the post-cyberpunk genre is offered by Rafael Miranda Huereca's doctoral dissertation, while Person defines it as follows: 'Post-cyberpunk uses the same immersive world-building technique [as cyberpunk], but features different characters, settings, and, most importantly, makes fundamentally different assumptions about the future. Far from being alienated loners, post-cyberpunk characters are frequently integral members of society (i.e., they have jobs). They live in futures that are not necessarily dystopic (indeed, they are often suffused with an optimism that ranges from cautious to exuberant), but their everyday lives are still impacted by rapid technological change and an omnipresent computerized infrastructure.'

[2] For a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of the technical aspects of the relationship between diamond structures and the use and development of nanotechnologies, see Merkle's article 'It's A Small, Small, Small, Small World', *MIT Technology Review*, 1 Feb. 1997.

[3] To better understand what it is meant by 'a culture of glass' see Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds* (2008), where the Victorian culture is explored as 'a dazzling semantics of glass' (1), taking into account several different aspects: from scientific discoveries to novels, to decorative objects, to architecture, to new optical tools…

[4] It can be argued that Nell's characterisation, half Dickensian and half post-modern, follows the 'recombinative strategies of adaptations' expressed by Jacklosky in Chapter 6.

[5] Miranda Huereca also points out how this emphasis on strong and good female characters differentiates Stephenson's post-cyberpunk from earlier examples of cyberpunk novels (108–24). See also McGinnis 481.

[6] Many scholarly accounts of Dickens's attitude towards education exist; see for instance Philip Collins, *Dickens and Education* (1963).

[7] About these authorial strategies, see Carolyn Oulton's *Dickens and the Myth of the Reader*.

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CHAPTER 8

Dickensian Realism in *The Wire*

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In the fifth season of the HBO series *The Wire* (2002–08), James Whiting, the fictional managing editor of the *Baltimore Sun*, decides that his staff needs to explore not only the murders perpetrated by a serial killer preying on the city's homeless population but also 'the Dickensian aspect of the homeless. The human element … the nature of homelessness itself'. In one little phrase, 'the Dickensian aspect', *The Wire* manages to capture precisely what is wrong with Whiting's approach to journalism: he is more interested in telling sentimental stories than exploring an issue in depth and documenting as many perspectives as possible. Whiting can only understand homelessness in the abstract: he sees it as an alien yet intriguing phenomenon, something to be romanticised and theorised. To ground the issue of homelessness in its very real and, oftentimes, unexciting causes would complicate the story and make it difficult for readers to seize on a single, compact image of homelessness. Whiting would rather reduce a story to an uncomplicated, palatable narrative than make the newspaper's readers face the hard, difficult-to-solve realities of their world, the very issues *The Wire*, with its gritty realism, has been lauded for exploring in their full complexity.

But is the Dickensian truly antithetical to realism? Certainly, there is precedent for applying the term 'Dickensian' to contemporary fiction, and recently published realist novels have frequently been described as such. In particular, Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch* (2013) was hailed as a modern, 'Dickensian'

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masterpiece. As Rob Jacklosky argues in Chapter 6, however, a more rigorous assessment of what exactly constitutes the Dickensian reveals that Tartt's novel, like many others, comes close to Dickens's style without fully embracing it. *The Goldfinch* in particular, Jacklosky asserts, does not possess, quite probably by choice, the pathos and humour characteristic of Dickens's writing. What this example illustrates is the commonplace status the word 'Dickensian' has taken on and the loose, ill-defined manner in which it is often applied. In Chapter 7, Francesca Arnavas also examines in detail what the Dickensian looks like in the context of contemporary fiction, in this case Neal Stephenson's science-fiction, post-cyberpunk novel *The Diamond Age* (1995). This chapter, too, will formulate a more precise understanding of the Dickensian, specifically in the context of Dickens as a realist writer.

In *The Wire*, Whiting's usage of the word 'Dickensian' may point to a particular reading of Dickens's fiction as extravagant and far-fetched, but, of course, this is not the only way to read the author's work. *The Wire* treats the concept of the Dickensian far more seriously than Whiting does. Despite praise for the realism of the series's first four seasons, critics deemed the plot of the fifth season too implausible, even absurd. The critics' complaints echo those made against the more romantic elements of Dickens's fiction, and this is precisely because the fifth season so deliberately appropriates Dickens's realism. Rather than placing Dickens in a simple, static category – realist or non-realist – the series is attuned to the ways in which Dickens's realism balances the mundane, unromantic aspects of life with the absurdities we so often overlook. Taking on such a recognisable (and contentious) mode of realism as Dickens's allows the series not merely to represent reality but to consider *how* reality is represented.

On the relationship between Dickens and *The Wire*, and that of the 19th-century novel and modern television in general, critics such as Jason Mittell and Ivan Kreilkamp have argued that the impulse to assume an uncomplicated, direct relationship between the novel and television is misguided. *The Wire* has been described as a novel for television by both its creator, David Simon, and also critics writing for popular media.[1] In light of this tendency to see *The Wire* as closer to literature, 'better than television' somehow, the objections of those advocating for media specificity make sense. These critics argue that to see the 19th-century novel as the immediate, and possibly only, forbear of the modern television serial is reductive and ignores the many other influences that have shaped the newer medium.[2] However, being mindful of, for instance, television's unique medium and history does not necessarily exclude recognising the connections it has to earlier modes of storytelling.

As scholars such as Frederic Jameson and Caroline Levine have made clear, there is still value in determining how a television series, *The Wire* in particular, relates to novelistic genres and forms because the narrative structures used in television are, at least in part, influenced by what came before it. Jameson argues that *The Wire* simultaneously navigates both realist and utopian plots: 'Utopian elements are introduced, without fantasy or wish fulfillment, into

the construction of the fictive, yet utterly realistic, events' (371). I too will argue that the series, despite its reputation for gritty realism, does introduce elements that fall outside the scope of what we typically call 'realism'. However, I agree with Levine that Jameson does not fully outline what supposedly distinguishes the series's realist plots from its utopian plots, and I share Levine's belief that 'it is the genius of *The Wire* to show that *both* kinds of plot are plausible' (*Forms* 135). To take Levine's claim one step further, I will also argue that these two plot types are, in fact, not wholly distinguishable at all in the series – they are intertwined in such a way as to produce a specific mode of realism, which I trace back to Dickens's representational practices.

Levine has argued that there are formal similarities between Dickens's work and *The Wire*. In her response to Mittell's argument that *The Wire* should be treated as a specifically televisual work rather than compared to novelistic genres, Levine asserts that 'a sharper take on form enables a more rigorous intermedia analysis, I would argue, than a focus on genre, and this sharpness allows us to grasp the specific ways that texts in different genres and media actually mediate our relations to social inequality' ('From Genre to Form' n.pag.). To demonstrate her point, Levine maps the ways in which the forms, or 'specific and defined principles of organization', within Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53) compare to those within *The Wire* ('From Genre to Form' n.pag.). Levine argues that 'a closer analysis of the forms of *Bleak House* and *The Wire* suggests some surprising similarities in their experiments with representing social class and agency. Both texts use unusual formal strategies to try to shift us away from conventional accounts of status and power' ('From Genre to Form' n.pag.). These 'unusual formal strategies' shared by both texts consist of frequent shifts between first- and third-person narration and perspective; movement through a large cast of characters, institutions, and networks; and an emphasis on the significance of coincidence and minor events. In addition to the work of other critics who have found compelling parallels between the realist serial fiction of the 19th century and the television serial today, Levine's analysis of *Bleak House* and *The Wire* demonstrates that, despite their differences, there certainly are connections between the two media worth analysing.[3]

While I too see the benefits of intermedial analysis and find the comparison of *The Wire* with *Bleak House* immensely productive, I will diverge from Levine by emphasising mode over form in my analysis of *The Wire*. I use the word 'mode' not because of any critical disagreement as to the importance of form to *The Wire* but rather because it is the most apt term available to describe precisely what I mean by 'Dickensian realism', which I see as a broad representational style comprised of many different aesthetic and social forms. Indeed, I am taking Levine's claims that forms 'overlap and intersect' as well as 'travel' as starting points in my analysis of *The Wire*'s appropriation of Dickensian realism (*Forms* 4). I agree with Levine that, 'rather than seeing realism as closing down strange and unfamiliar plots, we can understand *The Wire* as making strange, unconventional plots plausible—realist' (*Forms* 135). However, instead of

focusing on the workings of the different individual forms that converge within *The Wire*, I will analyse how the series borrows a specific author's – Dickens's – mode of storytelling in order to place the fantastic, seemingly unreal elements of life within a more recognisably realist story.

In what follows, I will examine how *The Wire* appropriates and reworks Dickens's realist mode to contemplate the concept of realism itself. Ironically, through the fifth season's use of seemingly unreal, fantastic plots, *The Wire* is able to make its most extensive commentary on realism and storytelling. The season's engagement with the popular reception of Dickens prompts viewers to question their understanding of the author's work, the mode of realism in which he wrote, and what 'Dickensian' means today. The series critiques realist storytelling, represented by institutions such as the newspaper, the educational system, the law, and the government – many of the same institutions that Dickens satirised. The newspaper office is the centre of this critique, the place where all those institutions, telling their supposedly 'real' stories, converge. The writers' decision to make the 'Dickensian' central to the drama of the newspaper office, where notions of truth are most directly interrogated, reflects the direction that the series's realism takes in its fifth season. The season pushes the boundaries of realism, as Dickens did in his own writing, for the purpose of prompting its viewers to question how the world is typically narrated and represented to them. At stake in the series's adoption of non-televisual modes of realism and, more importantly, in its interrogation of all realist modes of representation is the idea of truth itself. Instead of holding up any one institution, such as the newspaper office, as the definitive representative of truth, *The Wire* explores the ways in which truth is a complex, subjective idea. Before analysing how Dickensian realism operates within *The Wire*, I must first delve into the three major pillars of my argument: what realism means in the context of film and television, how *The Wire* explicitly participates in the debate surrounding realism (and Dickensian realism in particular) as a representational mode, and how realism functions within Dickens's fiction – in other words, what I mean by the term Dickensian realism.

Dickens's work has long been seen as a precursor to the narrative modes used in film and television. Sergei Eisenstein's seminal essay 'Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today' (1944), following D. W. Griffith's own claim that he drew on Dickens's work for filmic techniques, identifies several links between the narrative techniques, such as montage, found in Dickens's novels and those employed by film. Griffith's films were foundational in the development of classical Hollywood style, which was notable for the realism it introduced into cinema, so the fact that he claimed to have drawn on Dickens's work in particular suggests a link between Dickensian realism and the techniques influential in the development of realist filmmaking. Long after both Griffith's heyday and the publication of Eisenstein's essay, scholars of film and adaptation studies have followed their thinking by positioning great works of literature (especially novels) as the 'parents' and 'pedigree' of cinema (Eisenstein 232). Although

new ways of understanding literature and film have been proposed, we are far from abandoning consideration of their relationship.[4] Moreover, as television writers have proven the medium capable of producing not just entertainment but also ambitious art, writing on the relationship between literature and television has increased. As the critical response to *The Wire* suggests, television is now often considered the heir to the novel's legacy just as film was before.[5] Therefore, it is reasonable to ask how television, like film, may draw on other realist modes of representation, such as those found in the 19th-century novel.

Film criticism has long expressed concerns about the ideological implications of the realist mode. The aim of realist, also called 'illusionist' or 'escapist', cinema is to obscure from viewers the fact that they are watching a film. Walter Benjamin argues that, through reproduction, a work of art loses its 'aura', or the 'unique appearance of distance' one feels when looking upon the work (669). In the case of film, this loss of aura and distance – and the inability of the actor 'to adjust to the audience during his performance', as a dramatic actor can – enables the viewer both to critique and to identify with the camera: 'This permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experiencing any personal contact with the actor. The audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera. Consequently, the audience takes the position of the camera' (Benjamin 674). That consequence, the audience being subsumed into the camera's perspective, is what Benjamin and later critics find troubling ideologically; an audience directed by a camera can be trained to accept any number of beliefs and feelings, such as reverence for a leader and hatred of a supposed enemy. Jean-Louis Baudry famously argued that the work of a film is to obscure the camera apparatus, to hide the process by which the film is made:

> Between 'objective reality' and the camera, site of the inscription, and between the inscription and projection are situated certain operations, a work which has as its result a finished product. To the extent that it is cut off from the raw material ('objective reality') this product does not allow us to see the transformation which has taken place. (40)

By hiding the process that leads to the 'finished product', film gives the viewer the sense that they are watching reality as it is. Of course, this kind of argument assumes that viewers are completely passive and that only 'disturbing cinematic elements', as Baudry calls them, can jolt a viewer into awareness of the film as a medium (46).

How, though, might film and television that do rely on realism produce active viewers? With regard to *The Wire*, Galen Wilson argues that the series 'represents the blending of cinematic realism and journalistic methods' and that, by examining the series in light of its neorealist aesthetics, we can see how it calls attention to itself as a mode of representation (60). One other way that the series addresses its own representational practices, especially in its fifth season,

is through its portrayal of alternative modes of representation within the series's world. The newspaper plotlines and the 'Dickensian' allusions repeatedly bring the issue of representation to the viewer's attention. Moreover, the shared background of Dickens and Simon as journalists suggests a close connection between the two writers' approaches to storytelling: both began their careers as reporters and moved on to write fiction while remaining interested in journalistic detail and the exploration of social issues.

In working on the fifth season of *The Wire*, Simon directly drew on his experience reporting for the *Baltimore Sun*. The circulation of the phrase 'the Dickensian aspect' throughout Simon's fictionalised version of the newspaper office signals to viewers a particular kind of storytelling. Before the murders of the city's homeless men start gaining attention, Whiting, the newspaper's managing editor, tries to frame a series on the city's educational system in the same 'Dickensian' light he later shines on the murders: 'The word I'm thinking about is Dickensian. We want to depict the Dickensian lives of city children and then show clearly and concisely where the school system has failed them'. The newspaper's city desk editor, Augustus 'Gus' Haynes, responds to Whiting's remark by proposing a broader exploration of the lives of the city's children: 'You want to look at who these kids really are, you got to look at the parenting, or lack of it, in the city. The drug culture, the economics of these neighborhoods'. However, Whiting does not want to hear what Gus has to say, so he turns away and rolls his eyes. Upon noticing this, Scott Templeton, one of the writers present, says, 'You don't need a lot of context to examine what goes on in one classroom', to which Gus responds, 'Really? I think you need a lot of context to seriously examine anything'. Unsurprisingly, Whiting agrees with Scott (eventually making him the lead writer on the story) and argues that 'We need to limit the scope, not get bogged down in details … what I want to look at is the tangible, where the problem and solution can be measured clearly'. Whiting asks the newspaper staff to collapse a massive, systemic problem and fit it into a space just large enough to hold a simple story that produces a sufficient amount of outrage or compassion. Near the end of the meeting, Whiting exclaims, 'I don't want some amorphous series detailing society's ills', which is precisely how one might describe *The Wire* ('Unconfirmed Reports').

Even without the hints from the series's writers, who lionise Gus while they represent Whiting as the deterioration of modern journalism, Whiting's shallowness is apparent because the audience knows what the editor does not: the murders he goes on to sensationalise are a lie. In order to obtain the funds necessary to pursue a real investigation, detectives Jimmy McNulty and Lester Freamon invent several 'murders' of homeless men by staging natural deaths to look like the work of a serial killer. Whiting's participation in the lie exposes the lack of substance in the brand of sensationalism, or 'the Dickensian aspect', he encourages his writers to embrace. Because he decides to capitalise on the scandal surrounding the murders, Whiting becomes an unwitting, though still quite culpable, participant. Just like the fake murders, what Whiting envisions

as 'the Dickensian lives of city children', along with 'the nature of homelessness', is revealed to the series's audience as just another fiction.

Whiting's character, however, is not entirely fictional: he is based on a managing editor at the *Baltimore Sun* with whom Simon worked. In an interview, Simon described one interaction with this editor that echoes Whiting's treatment of the education series:

> He came to me and said, 'I want to do the stories that are about the Dickensian lives of children growing up in West Baltimore.' What he was saying was, 'If you give me a nice, cute eight-, nine-year-old kid who doesn't have a pencil, who doesn't have a schoolbook, who lives in poverty, who's big eyed and sweet and who I can make the reader fall in love with, I can win a fuckin' prize with that. Write me that shit. … Don't give me a guy who's, like, trying to get high but maintain his dignity. Don't give me anything complicated.' And he really used the word 'Dickensian'. (Interview with Jesse Pearson, December 2009)

This blurring of the line between reality and fiction occurs throughout *The Wire*: many of the series's actors are Baltimore locals, characters are frequently named for the actors who play them, characters are based on real people, and many events in the series are based on actual stories Simon researched or even reported himself. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Simon has more than one reason for making 'Dickensian' a keyword in the fifth season.

Simon has said that the decision to use the term 'Dickensian' was also meant as a response to the comparisons critics have drawn between the modes of storytelling in *The Wire* and those in Dickens's novels. Critics have often, sometimes purposefully and sometimes carelessly, compared Simon's television series to the 19th-century novel, and, when they name a specific author, they tend to cite Dickens. While Simon has acknowledged that he understands the source of the comparisons and has even praised Dickens's writing, he finds the comparisons unsuitable in one respect:

> [Dickens] would make the case for a much better social compact than existed in Victorian England, but then his verdict would always be, "But thank God a nice old uncle or this heroic lawyer is going to make things better." In the end, the guy would punk out.

Whereas Dickens's stories conclude too neatly for Simon's taste, he sees *The Wire* as a starker, more complete vision of the real world, claiming that '*The Wire* was actually making a different argument than Dickens' (interview with Jesse Pearson, December 2009). However, as Simon said in that same interview, the comparisons are not without warrant, and his choice to engage directly with those comparisons in the series's fifth season functions as far more than a joke at the critics' expense. Indeed, *The Wire*'s Dickensian allusions and

appropriations participate in a longstanding debate regarding Dickens's reputation as a realist novelist.

Dickens has variously been cast as a serious, realist writer and an entertaining, fanciful storyteller. However, more recently, critics have largely abandoned the practice of classifying Dickens's work according to this dichotomy alone. Terry Eagleton argues that it is precisely Dickens's seemingly unbelievable characters that enable his realism:

> 'Character' in literature, so we are informed, should be complex, rich, developing and many-sided, whereas Dickens's bunch of grotesques, perverts, amiable idiots and moral monstrosities are none of these things. But this is because they are realistic, not because they are defectively drawn … they are true to a new kind of social experience. Dickens's grotesque realism is a stylistic distortion in the service of truth, a kind of astigmatism which allows us to see more accurately. (149)

I find Eagleton's formulation far less reductive and more helpful in examining how Dickens's fiction actually works than the earlier practice of placing Dickens in one sharply defined category over another. Eagleton's description of Dickens's realism as a 'stylistic distortion', like an 'astigmatism', informs my own approach to Dickensian realism.

Dickens himself expressed an idea very similar to Eagleton's when commenting on his own novels. In the preface to *Bleak House*, he wrote, 'I have purposely dwelt on the romantic side of familiar things' (6). Dickens laid claim to the right to push the boundaries of realism and explore that which, obscured by a narrow-minded understanding of accuracy, is true in the wider sense of the word. In his preface to *Little Dorrit* (1855–57), Dickens identified the novel as *Bleak House*'s 'next successor' and defended himself against charges of hyperbole:

> If I might offer any apology for so exaggerated a fiction as the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office, I would seek it in the common experience of an Englishman, without presuming to mention the unimportant fact of my having done that violence to good manners, in the days of a Russian war, and of a Court of Inquiry at Chelsea. (7)

Dickens offered several more remarks like this as he satirically apologised for the supposedly unrealistic features of *Little Dorrit* and slyly identified their very real counterparts. In mock-defeat, Dickens wrote, 'But, I submit myself to suffer judgment to go by default on all these counts, if need be, and to accept the assurance (on good authority) that nothing like them was ever known in this land' (*LD* 7). Of course, Dickens was clearly hinting that such 'exaggerated' fictions as exist in his writing can also be found in life. Dickens's realism satirises the problems of human life and social institutions in order to cast them in a light so far from mundane that his readers cannot ignore them.

Dickens's writing straddles the line between the 'familiar' and the 'romantic', the former being what his readers would recognise as the real and the latter what they may mistake for the impossibly fantastic. Dickens may exaggerate and satirise, but, as satire necessitates, he draws the 'romantic' aspects of his writing out of the 'familiar'. Dickens's romance is not actually at odds with his realism because, as his prefaces to *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* indicate, the distinction between those two modes is one not of fact and fiction but of perspective. In his writing, Dickens does not appeal to some notion of 'objective' truth but instead demonstrates just how subjective truth is. For Dickens, truth changes largely according to the position from which you look at it. In *Bleak House*, the reality of Jo, a crossing sweeper and a classic Dickensian waif, is vastly different from that of Lady Dedlock. However, even those two characters are inextricably linked within the network of Dickens's world, and, as the novel progresses, the reader comes to find that both characters represent very real perspectives. While the ways in which the two characters inhabit the world may seem so different as to preclude their living in the same world at all, they are actually so near that each can exert an influence over the other's life. By refusing to adhere to a more restrictive mode of realism, Dickens offers readers a world like theirs but alien: a world with the same problems but one where they are made visible. Dickens does not so much invent the absurdities that colour his writing as he derives them from the daily absurdities to which we are so often inured. In his novels, Dickens acts on his right to 'dwell on the romantic side of familiar things', to explore the facets of life that the inhibited, socially trained mind can often miss. In its fifth season, *The Wire* takes up this right and goes even further by challenging the notion that there is any one kind of supreme truth. Through its allusions to Dickens and appropriation of the author's realist mode, *The Wire* 'dwells on the romantic side of familiar things' and, in doing so, asks the viewer to question not just realism but reality itself.

How then does *The Wire* resist the realist impulse to subsume the viewer into its own perspective? How does the series register an awareness of itself as a representational genre and pass that awareness on to its audience? According to Simon, the fifth season of the series is in fact 'about the media and our capacity to recognize and address our own realities' (interview with Nick Hornby, August 2007). Despite Simon's intentions, the season was criticised for its supposedly unrealistic plot (a criticism that recalls objections to Dickens's writing). This raises the question of how the series, within the traditionally realist medium of television, manages to utilise an especially outlandish plot in order to interrogate 'our own realities'. By exploring *The Wire*'s critique of realist modes of representation in its fifth season, it becomes possible to see how the series turns this critique back on itself and, in doing so, encourages its audience to think critically about how the world is represented to them. In what follows, I will analyse key moments in the fifth season that speak to the issues of realism and representation. In doing so, I will demonstrate how *The Wire* makes use of Dickensian realism, dwelling 'on the romantic side of familiar things', to underscore just how absurd reality can be.

I will begin with what has been deemed *The Wire*'s most absurd, unrealistic plotline: the fake serial killer. The first 'murder' occurs at the end of the fifth season's second episode, 'Unconfirmed Reports'. Early in the episode, Detective Jimmy McNulty learns that it is possible for natural deaths to appear identical to murders through the infliction of post-mortem injuries. Throughout the episode, Jimmy and his fellow detectives bemoan the fact that the department declined to continue funding an investigation against Marlo Stanfield, a drug kingpin responsible for 22 murders the previous year. In one scene, Jimmy, Lester Freamon, and Bunk Moreland muse that, if the 22 dead bodies had been white, the police department would have given them the resources necessary to close the case. Near the conclusion of their conversation, Lester says to Bunk, 'You think that if 300 white people were killed in this city every year, they wouldn't send the 82nd Airborne? Negro, please', to which Jimmy adds, 'There's got to be some way to make them turn on the faucet'. By the end of the episode, Jimmy has found a way to make the department 'turn on the faucet': he stages the first fake murder by strangling the corpse of a homeless man who had died of a drug overdose. What is remarkable about these scenes in 'Unconfirmed Reports', aside from how they advance the plot, is the motivation they clearly ascribe to Jimmy's actions. At the root of the murder Jimmy fabricates is not a perverted, homicidal desire but mundane bureaucracy: the department's budget has been greatly reduced because Mayor Tommy Carcetti has allotted more money to the indebted, failing city school system. By relating the 'familiar' issue of a bureaucratic funding struggle to the more 'romantic' serial killer plotline, *The Wire*'s writers, through Jimmy, draw attention to the inherent absurdity of bureaucracy.

As the serial killer plotline makes clear, the actions of the police department, the city government, and the newspaper are inextricably linked to Jimmy and Lester's lie. Those institutions create the conditions that instigate the lie and even propagate it. One revealing moment that illustrates how the series's writers play with notions of storytelling, truth-seeking, and lying appears in the season's first episode, 'More with Less'. The episode opens with a scene in which several detectives from the Homicide Unit, led by Bunk, rig a copier to act as a 'lie detector'. As they interrogate a suspect, they make copies of papers reading 'true' and 'false' and convince the suspect that the machine can read his heartbeat and confirm whether he is lying. After tricking the suspect into confessing, Bunk says with sage wisdom, 'The bigger the lie, the more they believe', which serves as the episode's epigraph in the title sequence. *The Wire*'s epigraphs, almost always taken from the mouths of its characters, tend to highlight ideas important for the episode and even the season and series as a whole. This epigraph, the first to appear in the fifth season, marks a central theme: lying. While lying of course occurs throughout the series, the fifth season gives the most attention to how lying functions as representation.[6] The logical conclusion of a remark like Bunk's is that people are unlikely to recognise the biggest lies as lies at all. Instead, they are more likely to see those lies as truth, mundane fact even.

What the fifth season shows its audience is that the biggest lies always emerge from institutions, which are more capable of generating and maintaining lies than individuals are. Much as Dickens, in the preface to *Little Dorrit*, identifies the real counterparts to his fictions, or 'lies', *The Wire* juxtaposes its characters' lies (as well as its own, as a fictional, representational text) with institutional lies in order to emphasise the magnitude of the latter.

One lie significant to the police department is its constant falsification of crime statistics, or 'stat games' as the characters call the practice; this practice is seen throughout the series. In 'Not for Attribution', Mayor Carcetti uses falsified statistics as leverage to force Police Commissioner Ervin Burrell to resign. In the series's final episode, the newly appointed commissioner Cedric Daniels refuses to participate in the lie:

> I'll swallow a lie when I have to. I've swallowed a few big ones lately. But the stat games? That lie? It's what ruined this department. Shining up shit and calling it gold, so majors become colonels and mayors become governors. Pretending to do police work while one generation fucking trains the next how not to do the job. And then—I looked Carcetti in the eye, I shook his hand, I asked him if he was for real. Well, this is the lie I can't live with. ('–30–')

The stat games, like the misrepresentations perpetuated by the city's other institutions, reflect the same impulse to lie and cover up the reality of Baltimore. What makes those lies more insidious than the fake serial killer scheme is that they are far 'bigger' and thus more easily believed. The same applies to the lies perpetuated by the mayor's office. Equally entangled in the homeless murder plotline (and equally ignorant of its reality), Mayor Carcetti decides to capitalise on the so-called murders and push the issue of homelessness in his campaign for governor. As a result, Carcetti generates his own lies in the form of false promises: he pledges resources he does not have to the investigation and gives grand speeches proclaiming his intention to fight homelessness despite not having any clear plan of action. In his self-interest and appeals to a vague, abstract notion of homelessness, Carcetti rivals even the *Baltimore Sun*'s managing editor, Whiting.

While many institutions represent, and misrepresent, reality in *The Wire*, the newspaper office is the site most closely associated with the act of representation itself. The *Baltimore Sun* office makes its first appearance in the series's fifth and final season, and, as the season's episode titles indicate (they are all related to the newspaper or journalism in general), the newspaper is central to the action of the season. Lying occurs just as often in the newspaper office as it does in the police department and City Hall. While Whiting's sensationalism and the institutional and commercial constraints to which the newspaper is subject lead to some questionable reporting, the most flagrant model of journalistic lying is the reporter Scott Templeton. Scott's character arc in the fifth

season revolves around his increasingly exaggerated stories. While he begins by embellishing the language of his stories, he progresses to adding whole lines to quotes, inventing people to interview, and, eventually, claiming that the (fake) serial killer spoke with him by phone. While city desk editor Gus Haynes grows suspicious of Scott throughout the season, Scott is not directly called out until a homeless veteran he interviewed visits the newspaper office to accuse him of making drastic additions to the veteran's story. The veteran, Terry Hanning, making his case to Gus, vehemently declares that 'A lie ain't a side of a story. It's just a lie' ('Clarifications'). Like Bunk's quip in the season's first episode, 'the bigger the lie, the more they believe', Terry's assertion serves as the eighth episode's epigraph, and it calls out the kind of storytelling privileged at the *Sun*. When a journalist thinks he does not 'need a lot of context to examine what goes on in one classroom' or to examine one 'side of a story', it becomes incredibly easy to lie (both intentionally and accidentally) and miss the truth of a story ('Unconfirmed Reports' and 'Clarifications').

Just like the money Lester memorably works to 'follow' in his investigations of Marlo Stanfield and other drug dealers in Baltimore, modes of representation and the lies that stand in for them circulate throughout the city, creating connections among *The Wire*'s different characters and institutions. In the first episode of the season, the serial killer plotline is prefigured by a photograph Gus declines to run in the newspaper. Among the rubble pictured in the photograph, meant to accompany a story about a fire in East Baltimore, is a burnt doll. Gus is suspicious of this detail and the photographer, so he calls the photo desk to ask for another picture to accompany the story. Upon hanging up, Gus exclaims of the photographer, 'Every fire photo he brings in there's just got to be some burnt doll somewhere in the debris. I can see that cheating motherfucker now with his fucking harem of dolls pouring lighter fluid on each one. You check his fucking truck, you'll find a whole collection of them' ('More with Less'). While this scene introduces some comedy into the episode, its function extends well beyond that. Although the serial killer plotline does not begin until the second episode, the burnt doll featured in the first foreshadows how Jimmy manipulates the dead bodies of homeless men in order to replicate the injuries of murder victims. From the first episode of the season, the fabrications of the newspaper staff are linked to the fake serial killer story.

In the third episode, 'Not for Attribution', an early scene utilises cross-cutting between journalist Alma Gutierrez as she tries to get hold of a copy of the day's newly printed edition and Jimmy as he falsifies evidence for the serial killer case. One particularly effective cut occurs as Alma enters the newspaper's printing factory: upon seeing the newssheets circulating via the factory's conveyor belts, the camera cuts to Jimmy crumpling red ribbon (the serial killer's signature, which he leaves tied around the wrists of his victims) to plant in the evidence folder for a past case. The meaning of the comparison drawn by the cross-cutting sequence is clear: Jimmy's lies are not unlike those of the newspaper. Fittingly, the story Alma is so eager to see printed, what should have been a prominent front-page piece about a triple homicide perpetrated against a family, has been

moved down 12 inches below the fold. Actions like this indicate what the newspaper does and does not prioritise in its representation of Baltimore.

In that same episode, Jimmy defends his actions to Bunk, who wants nothing to do with the scheme, by saying that 'Upstairs wouldn't jump on a real serial killer—fuckin' Marlo, who's got bodies all over him. Maybe they need the make-believe'. Jimmy, frustrated with how little attention and resources a serious murder case has received, argues that the only way to make people care about crime is to give them 'make-believe'. As much as this is a comment on his superior officers and the government of Baltimore, it is also a critique of the way murders are covered by media outlets. This constitutes an address to the viewer as well: *The Wire*, for all its realism, is 'make-believe', and the series's writers want their audience to be aware of this and to think more critically about the ways they consume entertainment and news media. Lester, upon being let into the secret later in the episode, essentially tells the viewer what they want as he informs Jimmy of how he can best capture attention:

> I mean, if you want to do it right, a straight-up strangle's not enough. Not if it's some vagrant. Sensationalize it. Give the killer some fucked-up fantasy, something bad, real bad. It's got to grip the hearts and minds, give the people what they want from a serial killer. ('Not for Attribution')

While Lester is more blunt about the matter, what he describes is not that different from Whiting's 'Dickensian aspect': both Lester and Whiting have a clear idea of what 'the people' want from the objects represented to them, and both realise that the only way to represent those objects as desired is to sentimentalise, sensationalise, and alienate them. Whether the object is a child living in poverty, a homeless person, or even a murderer, what 'the people' want, apparently, is an Other against whom they can position themselves. By openly discussing the way crime is represented in news and entertainment media, *The Wire* calls attention to both its own narrative mode and its viewers' desires. Moreover, by placing the newspaper's faults alongside the serial killer hoax, the latter appears far more plausible than it might otherwise. After all, the serial killer Jimmy and Lester invent is precisely the kind that fits into a recognised narrative and seizes attention from the press and government – the kind that becomes most visible because of that attention.

When the truth comes out near the season's end, there is a parallel between how Jimmy's and Scott's lying is revealed. While the serial killer plotline and the placement of scenes throughout the season alert the viewer to their similar situations, one scene in the final episode emphasises this beyond anything else. When Scott arrives at the Homicide Division to ask Jimmy questions about the 'murders', Jimmy grows frustrated and gives up the pretence of being ignorant of Scott's lies:

> Jimmy: 'You lying motherfucker, you're as full of shit as I am. And you've got to live with it and play it out as far as it goes, right? Trapped in the

> same lie. Only difference is, I know why I did it. But fuck if I can figure out what it gets you in the end. But, hey, I'm not part of your tribe.'
> Scott: 'You're not serious?'
> Jimmy: 'No, no, I'm a fucking joke. And so are you.' ('–30–')

Jimmy's frank discussion of the lie and his assertion that both he and Scott are jokes draws the viewer's attention to their characters as fictional constructs, specifically constructs meant to entertain and mislead. If a joke is something too ridiculous to be believed or taken seriously, then many might see Jimmy or Scott as just that. These two characters participate in and perpetuate the serial killer plotline, contributing to what many critics have called the most over-the-top aspect of *The Wire*'s fifth season, if not the series as a whole. However, the circumstances under which they get involved in the lie – a detective frustrated with the lack of support from the police department and a journalist looking to rise in the ranks and win fame for himself and his newspaper – are not at all uncommon. What grounds the seemingly unrealistic elements of Jimmy's and Scott's stories in reality is how those stories emerge from institutional structures.

The Wire, like Dickens's *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, balances its 'romantic' elements with 'familiar things': by placing the questionable and bizarre situation of the fake serial killer within the context of ordinary, institutional problems, the series's fifth season forces its audience to acknowledge that those ordinary problems are actually quite extraordinary in their reach, complexity, and difficulty. *The Wire* creates a resemblance between the seemingly exaggerated fictions of its individual characters and plots and the more believable absurdities of the institutions it portrays. This juxtaposition allows the viewer to see institutional failures for what they are. Instead of passively accepting the inefficiencies and injustices of the institutions that govern both the characters' lives and their own, the viewer is given a way of seeing and critiquing those faults. Like Dickens's fiction, *The Wire* illuminates the problems of ordinary life in such a way that the series's audience cannot miss or ignore them. By giving its audience a plotline that directly calls into question its 'realism', which it constantly returns to through the newspaper office and its Dickensian allusions and appropriations, the series reveals itself as representation rather than reality. No longer is the viewer encouraged simply to adopt a perspective and watch reality being represented to them. Instead, *The Wire* asks its viewers to take a critical, analytical stance to both the institutions and texts that represent the world to them.

Endnotes

[1] During a 2007 interview with Nick Hornby for *The Believer*, Simon said that '[*The Wire*] isn't really structured as episodic television and it instead pursues

the form of the modern, multi-POV novel'. Simon has been quoted expressing this sentiment on several occasions, and he even pitched the series as a televised novel to HBO and hired novelists to write for the series (Talbot). For critics who have compared the series to a novel, see Charlie Brooker writing for *The Guardian* (2007), *The Telegraph* (2009), Adam Kirsch and Mohsin Hamid writing for *The New York Times*, and Brian Lowry writing for *Variety* (2015). See also Joy Delyria and Sean Michael Robinson's novel *Down in the Hole: The Unwired World of H.B. Ogden* (2012), which places characters and scenes from *The Wire* in a Victorian setting.

[2] In *Network Aesthetics* (2016), Patrick Jagoda acknowledges how *The Wire* 'draws heavily from the multiplot novel and the classical cinema it inspired' and asserts that the series diverges from these media in order to develop 'its own network realism' (115). Jagoda also claims that, through its characters' invocations of the Dickensian, '*The Wire* sharply contrasts the realist melodrama of the Dickensian multiplot novel with its own network realism' (115). While I agree with Jagoda that *The Wire* does more than merely imitate earlier iterations of realist storytelling, I argue that the series is actually performing a sophisticated sleight of hand by presenting characters who misconstrue the Dickensian while the series itself simultaneously adopts a Dickensian realism in its fifth season.

[3] See one of Levine's other essays 'Extraordinary Ordinariness: Realism Now and Then' (2013). See also Liz Maynes-Aminzade, 'You're Part of Something Bigger: Macrorealist TV' (2013) and Matthew Kaiser, 'From London's East End to West Baltimore: How the Victorian Slum Narrative Shapes *The Wire*' (2011).

[4] See Brian McFarlane, 'Reading Film and Literature,' in the *Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen* (2007), for one example of this trend.

[5] For example, John Romano argues, in 'Writing after Dickens: The Television Writer's Art' from *Dickens on Screen* (2003), that Dickens's work has actually informed the ways in which television writers work today. *New York Times* critic Nicholas Kulish offers a similar claim: 'If Charles Dickens were alive today, he would watch "The Wire," unless, that is, he was already writing for it'.

[6] While I have previously invoked Dickens's argument that 'romantic' elements are crucial for the representation of 'familiar things', here I find another revealing analogue to *The Wire* in Oscar Wilde's dialogue essay 'The Decay of Lying' (1889). Through the figures of Vivian and Cyril (named for Wilde's children), the essay argues that all representation is in fact 'lying' and that the liar is the supreme artist: 'Art, breaking from the prison-house of realism, will run to greet [the liar], and will kiss his false, beautiful lips, knowing that he alone is in possession of the great secret of all her manifestations, the secret that Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style' (981).

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CHAPTER 9

Grand Aspirations: Putting Pip on the Stage *Adaptations and Absences*

Michael Eaton

Writing to his friend John Forster in 1837 of theatrical performances of his works, specifically an early pirated version of *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens observed:

> Well; if the *Pickwick* has been the means of putting a few shillings in the vermin-eaten pockets of so miserable a creature, and has saved him from a workhouse or a jail, let him empty out his little pot of filth and welcome. I am quite content to have been the means of relieving him. (*Letters* 1:304)

This gives some indication of his understandable attitude to the 'purloiners' of his work; on another occasion, he attended a performance of a play of *Oliver Twist* and 'laid himself down upon the floor in a corner of the box and never rose from it until the drop-scene fell' (Forster 381). I suppose I must include myself among this number. Nevertheless, this chapter offers reflections on my adaptation of *Great Expectations* for the West Yorkshire Playhouse in March/April 2016 (directed by Lucy Bailey), exploring the decisions made in adapting *Great Expectations* for a new theatrical production and demonstrating how the

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constraints and opportunities of the medium determine dramaturgical choices. I shall also explore efforts to put Pip on the stage from the late 19th century to the present, considering the role of illustration in visualising the novel and the text's chequered performance history.

What should Great Expectations look like?

Unlike readers of his earlier serialised works, those who followed the instalments of *Great Expectations* in the pages of *All The Year Round* from December 1860 to August 1861 were given no visual representations of the characters, situations, and setting (in fact, of all of Dickens's novels, only *Great Expectations* and *Hard Times* were first published without any illustrations). There was no help from a 'Phiz' or even from a John Leech. It was across the Atlantic that the work was first illustrated, by John McLenan in the serialisation by *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization*, which actually went on sale one week ahead of the British publication. Though this artist was known as 'the American Phiz', I doubt anyone would claim his 40 pictures to be the equal of the work of Hablot K. Browne (whose illustrations are briefly discussed by Katie Bell in Chapter 3). Nevertheless, transatlantic readers were treated to a fuller aesthetic experience than those who consumed the new story in the austere, unillustrated, small print of the weekly conducted by the Inimitable himself.[1]

Back home, readers would have to wait a year until the tale was eventually published in the one-volume Chapman and Hall Library Edition, containing a measly eight woodcuts by Marcus Stone. Stone, only 22 years old, was the son of Dickens's late friend and neighbour, Frank Stone, and Dickens had rather taken him under his wing and into the bosom of the family. Critics such as Malcolm Andrews have argued that Dickens had been disappointed with Phiz's pictures for *A Tale of Two Cities* when it was reissued in monthly parts, and was after a much more 'realistic' (Schelstraete 55) depiction, in line with the fashion of the 1860s.[2] *Great Expectations* has comparatively few comic scenes, though is far from devoid of great *dramatis personae* drawn with a characteristically Dickensian broad brush. Whatever the disputed circumstances of Stone's advancement, I am not alone in finding his pictures entirely lifeless, not succeeding at what Emily Eells describes as a 'freezing of the action' in her discussion of McLenan's illustrations (220).[3] (Although Stone undoubtedly quitted himself far more creditably, taking on *Our Mutual Friend*, when Dickens reverted to monthly publication.)

Other illustrators followed throughout the 19th century: most notably, in America, Sol Eytinge Junior, who was commissioned for the Diamond Edition knocked out to cash in on Dickens's reading tour of 1867–68, and, in England, Frederick Pailthorpe for an 1885 edition. None of these provides particularly memorable additions to the Charles Dickens Picture Book, and none of these

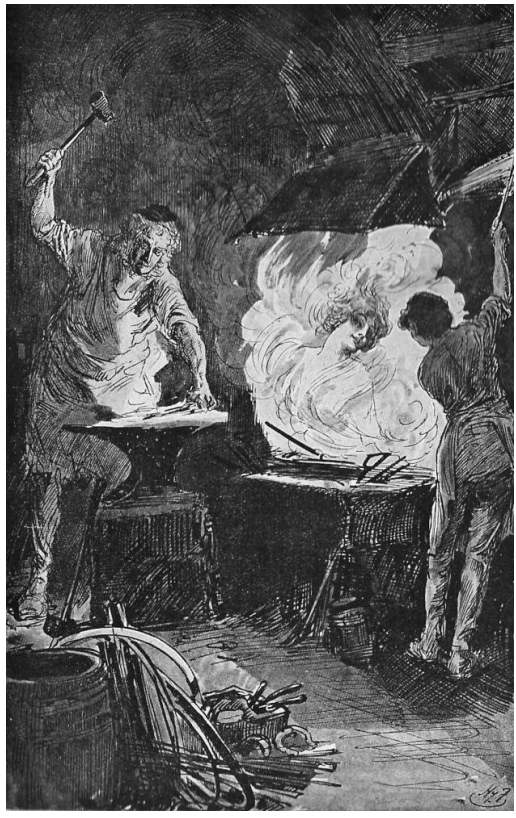

Figure 9.1: ***Pip fancies he sees Estella's Face in the Fire***, lithograph by Harry Furniss, 1910. Source: Victorian Web http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/furniss/front.html. Scanned image by Philip V. Allingham.

artists come close to capturing either the melancholic profundity or the (occasional) bizarre comicality of this masterpiece of thwarted, deluded aspirations. Cumulatively, though, they all combine to give some visual embodiment to a story originally conceived without pictures. But at the end of the 19th century Pip, Joe, Miss Havisham, Estella, Wopsle, Wemmick, Jaggers, et al. remained definitively undrawn.

My own *visual* introduction to *Great Expectations* came through the Classics Illustrated comic, with its striking cover of the opening chapter. But I was very fortunate to read the work itself for the first time in the 1910 Charles Dickens Library edition, which I inherited from my grandfather. This contained 27 drawings by the great and prolific Harry Furniss (also a cinematic pioneer),[4] who was proud of his reputation as the first illustrator of the entire Dickens canon. At last, *Great Expectations* had pictures worthy of the prose.

A drama on many stages

Dickens may be the Inimitable, but he is far from the Unadaptable. From the first rise of his celebrity, his stories and characters had a life outside his own management, and to no pecuniary advantage to himself. His reaction, in this age before widespread copyright, was understandably forthright, both here and, especially, in America.[5]

This bare-faced larceny was particularly acute in the theatrical versions, staged often before the books themselves had completed their serialisation. Dickens puts his own complaints into the mouth of the eponymous hero of *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838):

> [Y]ou drag within the magic circle of your dulness, subjects not at all adapted to the purposes of the stage … you take the uncompleted books of living authors, fresh from their hands, wet from the press, cut, hack, and carve them … hastily and crudely vamp up ideas not yet worked out by their original projector, do your utmost to anticipate his plot – all this without his permission, and against his will; … to which you put your name as author … Now, show me the difference between such pilfering as this, and picking a man's pocket in the street… . (633)

A decade into his literary career, however, Dickens got wise and found a way to be to be in control of his own work. For his third Christmas Book, *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), Dickens did a financial deal with the Lyceum Theatre, run by a far more celebrated theatrical family than the Crummles: the Keeleys. The correspondent of *The Almanack of the Month*, 'W.H.W.', explained:

> That the Cricket might be served up quite warm to the play going public, on the *foyer* of the Lyceum Theatre, its author – Mr. Charles Dickens – supplied the dramatist, Mr. Albert Smith, with proof-sheets hot from the press. On the evening of the morning, therefore, on which the book was published, its dramatic version was produced; and, as the adaptor stuck very closely indeed to the text of the original, of course it succeeded. (quoted in Edgar Pemberton 158)

This 'authorised version' pipped the first competitor to the post by 11 days. By the time Smith's play opened in New York on 21 February 1846, there had already been no fewer than 21 other productions mounted in Britain!

The same dodge was attempted in 1861 with the publication, at the office of *All The Year Round* on Wellington Street, Strand, of *Great Expectations: A Drama in Three Stages. Founded on, and Compiled from, the Story of That Name*, the title page clearly declaring it to be 'By Charles Dickens'. Malcolm Morley, who wrote an invaluable series of articles chronicling theatrical adaptations in

the *Dickensian* throughout the mid-1950s, considers this to be an attempt to 'retain stage copyright', to secure 'protection from pilfering bookwrights' (79). Though issued under Dickens's own name, Morley speculates that it was quite probably arranged by someone else in the *All The Year Round* office. There is no evidence to suggest this dramatisation was ever produced, and copies are extremely rare.[6] Philip V. Allingham, in an article on the *Victorian Web*, gives a précis of this, quoting Worth:

> There is no chase, no capture, no trial, no deathbed scene for Magwitch; more important, there is no remorse, no repentance, no reformation for Pip. (172)

Allingham reproduces the title page and the cast of characters, also rationally speculating that the omission of actors' names against the *dramatis personae* 'suggest(s) that the play was never performed' ('Who wrote the 1861 adaptation of *Great Expectations*?'). In this list, that there is no (a word which will recur throughout) Wopsle, no Wemmick, so no Aged P, no Trabb nor his boy, no Bentley Drummle, though Orlick is there, as are the insignificant Sarah, Georgiana, and Camilla Pocket, billed as Miss Havisham's relations.

But there is one adaptation which, though again never destined to be performed, was certainly produced by Dickens's own hand in an attempt to gain complete control over his own work – for financial exploitation as well as great enjoyment.

For three years after he gave the first paid reading of one of his works – an (almost) complete rendition of *A Christmas Carol* – he himself rendered the recently finished book into a version to be delivered on his public reading tours.[7] Strangely, rather than selecting a particular section of the entire story (as he did with, for instance, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield*), Dickens attempted to digest the entire novel. The resulting text ran to 160 printed pages and 30,000 words, which, had it ever been delivered, would have lasted over three hours. Such an abridgement necessarily led to conflations and excisions, some more surprising than others. In making the story of Pip and Magwitch the main spine, there was no Orlick and no Biddy but, amazingly, also no Estella. As subsequent adapters were to follow, myself included, the early visits to Satis House were conflated into one scene, as were the scenes after Magwitch's return when Pip learns the backstory of his unexpected and unwelcome benefactor. Among some of the most comical, yet thematically significant, moments to be left on the cutting room floor, there was no visit of Joe to London. This gloriously embarrassing chapter might have made a delightful reading on its own, as would Wemmick escorting Pip to the Walworth 'castle' to meet the Aged P, or Wopsle playing the title role in *Hamlet*.

By far the greatest challenge to any adaptation in whatsoever medium is how to convey the growing awareness of the older Pip, the first-person narrator,

upon his boyhood experiences in the marshes and the self-serving actions of his life as a young man in London, before the revelation of the tainted source of his expectations. Small wonder Dickens abandoned the idea of giving this revised version of the entire work. Did he soon come to realise that his profundity would perforce be lost in this cut-down version for public performance? Should Estella be ejected from Pip's *Bildungsroman*, the central theme of the vast abyss separating the classes and the deluded quest of the 'hero' to become a 'gentleman' worthy of such a lady (of whose own even more low-born origins he is entirely unaware) could never be represented.

Callaghan concludes:

> [T]he reading version turns the novel into little more than a heart-warming morality tale, Victorian in its emphasis on the value of hard work and selflessness and the crossing of social boundaries through sympathy, but largely independent of a specific social and economic milieu. (555)

Perhaps there is something about this masterpiece which makes it inimical to transposition into any dramatic medium? Perhaps its perfect existence should best remain in the relationship between the writer's words on the page and the mind of the reader avidly consuming them, eschewing illustration and adaptation? But fools continue to rush in…

Malcolm Morley writes of several American productions throughout the 1860s, for one of which 'the price of admission included the sight of a living hippopotamus in the Museum to which the theatre had been grafted by the big time showman Phineas T. Barnum' (Morley 80). Londoners would have to wait until after Dickens's death, on 9 June 1870, for a theatrical version, which opened at the Court Theatre almost a year later in May 1871. This adaptation was the work of a barrister and, at that time, amateur playwright, W. S. Gilbert. In a letter to *The Times*, the soon-to-be Savoyard claimed, 'Before I commenced to adapt *Great Expectations* I applied for, and obtained, the express permission of Mr. Charles Dickens, jun (9)'.[8]

Philip H. Bolton, in his monumental catalogue *Dickens Dramatized* (1987), records that the show crossed the Atlantic to play Boston and was revived in London six years later, so it must be counted as something of a success.

Gilbert deals with the long chronology of the original by having a prologue on the marshes preceding three acts. As was common in those days, both Pips, 'a child of seven' (1) and the older incarnation when 'ten years have elapsed' (9), were played by female actors (Jennie Lee, for instance, forged a career from her personation of 'Little Jo the Crossing Sweeper' from *Bleak House*.) The prologue follows the early chapters quite faithfully, with one significant change: the threatened 'Young Man' is here not Compeyson but 'another escaped convict' (5) – Dolge Orlick – who will become the villain of the piece. This tilts the piece

from the off towards conventional melodrama, erasing Magwitch's class resentment against the exploitative 'gentleman'.

If Dickens had made a surprising excision in his reading version by getting rid of Estella, Gilbert contrives an even more brutal erasure. For, though spoken of, there is no appearance of Miss Havisham. Also referred to but never allowed to don the motley is poor Wopsle. Joe is given his fair due, as is Jaggers. But the most outstanding modification to the fundamental storyline occurs at the end of Act III – which only goes to show that everyone, even Dickens himself, has trouble providing satisfying 'closure' to this troubling story.

The climax takes place at the sluice house, where Orlick is about to throttle Pip. There are those commentators who have seen Orlick as Pip's evil twin, a Jungian shadow – a critical concept which, I must admit, I have never quite bought.[9] But Gilbert may well have anticipated this interpretation. Magwitch enters in the nick of time to dispatch the antagonist before Joe, Herbert, Estella, and Biddy appear on the scene. Old Provis is then shot by a police sergeant. Before he draws his final breath, Pip reveals to him that Estella is his daughter – though how Pip himself knows this amazing news is something of a mystery – and that she will be his wife. The stage direction reads '*(Magwitch makes a violent effort to embrace Estella. He kisses her, places her hand in Pip's, and dies)*' (50). The sensational demands of 19th-century popular theatre are thus satisfied entirely at the expense of the psychological anxieties of the original.

The Times of 2 June 1871 was complimentary, praising Gilbert for performing 'a task by no means easy with considerable skill', though it is perceptive about the role of Pip: 'it may be laid down as a general truth that the so-called "hero" of a narrative fiction, the person whose adventures constitute its substance, and who is always in the presence of the reader, never asserts his importance on the stage'. It concludes with some sadness, 'we cannot forebear the remark that no dramatic version, however skilful or complete, can convey even a faint notion of the work of our great and lamented novelist'. When the show was revived at the Royal Westminster Aquarium (don't ask – I didn't) in March 1877, the notice in the 'Thunderer' was less effusive. Gilbert, usually so 'ingenious' an adapter, was said to have produced 'a somewhat dull play … a failure'. The reviewer regrets the absence of Miss Hav*er*sham (*sic*) – a name destined to be misspelled as frequently as that of Bill Sikes, whose 'i' is so often substituted with a 'y'. A general reflection on dramatic adaptation is well made:

> A knowledge of the novel would certainly render the play intelligible, but in adaptations of the best-known works of fiction such knowledge should never be presumed. If a play can only be understood by reference to what is not presented on the stage, if the action which is exhibited on the stage is only intelligible by a knowledge of the action which occurs off the stage, it is obvious that this play must be deficient in one of the first qualifications for dramatic success.

And yet still we persist…

Passing over other, relatively few, dramatisations, there is one worthy of mention, for reasons that will become apparent. This was presented in December 1939 in London during the Phoney War, not at a West End theatre but in the Rudolf Steiner Hall just off Regent's Park. The Actors' Company was a short-lived 'collective', and their version was written by a then-unknown thespian, Alec Guinness and directed by the equally soon-to-be-exalted George Devine. The production was financed by a whip-round: John Lewis, eponymous founder of the retail emporium, pitched in 50 pounds and Edith Evans, not yet a dame, opened her handbag to cheerfully lose 700 pounds.

I have never seen a text, but Morley's account states that the play was narrated by 'two story tellers serving as a chorus'. They were Guinness himself (who also took the role of Herbert Pocket) and his then-wife Merula Salaman (who also played Biddy). The importance of this off-Shaftesbury Avenue show is that the actress Kay Walsh went to see her friend, the stunning Martita Hunt, in the role of Miss Havisham, dragging along her reluctant husband, who had never read Dickens and whose first response to the invitation was 'Not bloody likely' (Brownlow 206). But David Lean was captivated, finding the show 'absolutely wonderful'. The intervention of hostilities postponed his desire to film the book, but in 1946 his Cineguild production became the definitive cinematic statement of the metaphorical aspirations of a post-war Britain.

Part of my existence

It took me some time to come at *Great Expectations*, though I had worked with Dickens's texts many times. Both *The Bride's Chamber* (an interpolated ghostly tale from the Dickens/Collins series of travel articles 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices' [1857]) and, especially, that neglected masterpiece of short fiction 'George Silverman's Explanation' (1868) had never previously been dramatised in any medium and were of such a length to make them ideal for Radio Four's 45-minute Afternoon Play slot. I am particularly fond of the five short dramas which were broadcast in the bicentennial week of February 2012 – *The Special Correspondent for Posterity* was lovingly stitched together from Dickens's writings throughout his life about London, but what made this project so special were the accompanying films brilliantly directed by Chris Newby, making this a unique broadcasting experiment. My screenplay of *Dombey and Son* fell at the final hurdle of pre-production, which is a great shame as the book has only previously been developed twice as a feature film. Interestingly, both of these fine versions – Maurice Elvey's 1919 production adapted by Eliot Stannard, patron saint of British screenwriters, and *Rich Man's Folly*, directed by John Cromwell in 1931 in the early days of sound – had been relocated to contemporary settings. That my rather Strindbergian domestic tragedy remains in development limbo (should that be purgatorio?) is a source of rancour and frustration.

I had elaborate justifications for my previous Dickens adaptations: I had never seen or heard a version of *Pickwick Papers* that had made me laugh, and the evident fact that the young Dickens had so completely changed his mind about his middle-aged eponymous 'hero' during the course of the serialisation, transforming him from a buffoon into a saint, allowed me to, as it were, come up with the second draft he never had a chance to write. It was the part Timothy Spall was born to play, and when the BBC turned down the script they had commissioned we were able to take it to radio, though we continue to make periodic attempts to get the piece in front of a camera in one form or another.

However, I had never conceived of taking on *Great Expectations*, considering it pretty much perfect and remaining sceptical of previous cinematic sorties, even that of Lean so highly regarded. I am rather fond of the 12-minute 1909 distillation *The Boy and the Convict* included on my DVD compilation for the British Film Institute *Dickens Before Sound*. Perhaps my favourite adaptation is the Danish *Store Forventninger*, helmed by A.W. Sandberg in 1922, one of four silent versions of the works of Dickens produced by (and nearly bankrupting) the Nordisk company which is available on the website of the Danish Film Archive.

My selection as the adapter of *Great Expectations* was entirely due to the great director, Lucy Bailey. She had been sent three recent versions but, to her undying credit and my eternal gratitude, said she would only do it if she could work with me as writer. Lucy and I had previously collaborated on a three-part radio adaptation of George Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866) – a 'flawed' work by a great 19th-century novelist, worthy of dusting down – and on our as-yet-to-be-produced version of Thomas Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872).

Naturally, once I undertook to adapt the novel, I could not allow myself to read the plays she had turned down. But I do know that every one of them had used narration. This approach is, of course, a staple of radio drama, and was used to great effect on the stage in David Edgar's acclaimed two-part *Nicholas Nickleby* for the RSC back in the 1980s, where the resources of a vast company could step out of character to deliver the glories of Dickens's third-person commentary upon the characters and scenes. I confess that, for a moment, even I contemplated having three Pips: the boy on the marshes, the young would-be gentleman, and the older man breaking the fourth wall to confide to the spectators what he had come so late to learn. A short trans-hemispheric conversation with Lucy soon persuaded me this was a really terrible notion.

My 'challenge' would be to depict Pip's sentimental education, so we both understand and judge him. We have to be ahead of his own realisations before he catches up with us. This is what would create pathos and suspense, even for those audiences already aware of 'the twist in the tale': that it is not the rich, eccentric lady but the coarse convict who is the source of the wealth that allows Pip to transform himself into a gentleman, but means he can never truly be one. From the outset, there was no question for me of deploying the theatrical convention of having grown-up actors play their younger selves. Perhaps

it was that cover of the Classics Illustrated comic, my first introduction, which convinced me that the story could not be told without the stark picture of a tiny lad confronted by a massive chained convict in a lonely churchyard. From the moment Magwitch touches the boy, Pip is marked with the taint of criminality and his life, hitherto determined as a blacksmith's apprentice, is cast into liminality – from which, it could be plausibly argued, he never quite escapes.

So, before the work began, a decision was taken which would have logistical and budgetary implications: the young Pip must be played by a young actor. This means that Estella, too, would have to be played both as a girl and as a young woman. Casting a third juvenile as Herbert Pocket was perhaps not inevitable, but it would be such a shame not to include the boxing match – a moment of light relief in the heavy atmosphere of Satis House which also thickens the plot when Pip meets the older Herbert in their metropolitan lodgings, confirming to him that it must be Miss Havisham who is his benefactress. Deciding upon three young parts meant that six young actors had to be cast as the law, not 'a ass' in this regard, requires alternation of performance and the contracting of chaperones. This inevitably put a strain on the budget, meaning we had to dispense with one adult actor, and has proven to be a stumbling block for touring the show. Nevertheless, to see young Pip working with Joe at the anvil mutating into his older self as the vision of Estella dances before him to taunt him in his role as a 'common labouring boy' more than confirmed the decision.

We had a cast of nine, plus two recipients of the West Yorkshire Playhouse Graduate Programme, which perforce imposed some interesting doubling. The actor playing Wemmick (Anthony Bunsee) had to warn Pip (Daniel Boyd) not to go home, before rushing not to snag his tights for his immediate appearance as Wopsle playing Hamlet in the next scene. Another swift backstage change came when Jaggers (Shaun Prendergast), after informing Pip of his sister's death, had to don a wig and adopt his Kentish brogue to come on as Pumblechook for her funeral. As the same actor (Rose Wardlaw) played both Missis Joe and Biddy, I had to rewrite the scene of the latter tending the former, which would have shown Biddy's kind heart and Missis Joe's parlous state after the attack. Some roles could not be doubled: Pip, whether as a child (Rhys Gannon/Sullivan Martin) or young man, cannot dilute his central presence. Neither could the towering figures of Magwitch (Ian Burfield) or Miss Havisham (Jane Asher), and Estella (Shanaya Rafaat) can only be Estella.

A more significant theatrical constraint was that we could only have one set. Clearly *Great Expectations* could never be 'a well-made play', following Aristotle's unities of time, place, and tone. Such proliferation of location had never troubled 19th-century theatrical professionals, as it had never bothered the Elizabethans. But staging a play with so many changes of scene does focus the minds of director and designer. However 'faithful' I wanted to be to the marvellous source text, this show could never be 'naturalistic': there would

Figure 9.2: ***The Hunt*** from Eaton's production at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, 2016. Photography by Idil Sukan. Copyright Idil Sukan, reproduced with permission.

Figure 9.3: ***Joe's Forge*** from Eaton's production at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, 2016. Photography by Idil Sukan. Copyright Idil Sukan, reproduced with permission.

Figure 9.4: ***Miss Haversham's table*** from Eaton's production at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, 2016. Photography by Idil Sukan. Copyright Idil Sukan, reproduced with permission.

Figure 9.5: ***Wemmick*** from Eaton's production at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, 2016. Photography by Idil Sukan. Copyright Idil Sukan, reproduced with permission.

Figure 9.6: ***Pip and Estella*** from Eaton's production at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, 2016. Photography by Idil Sukan. Copyright Idil Sukan, reproduced with permission.

always have to be a certain symbolic abstraction to the design, against which our company would have to perform the drama.

It was Lucy who decided that the design would be based upon the hulk from which Magwitch escapes in the very first image of the play, providing an objective correlative to the underlying theme of that criminal taint from which Pip can never free himself. In a review for the *Dickensian*, Paul Graham wrote:

> Set designer Mike Britton ensures that the brooding presence of the rotting, wooden prison ship is permanently moored at the centre of the action. The revolving stage presents an external view of the vessel for the scenes on the marshes and in the streets of London; whilst the claustrophobic internal structure provides the backdrop for those scenes set in forge, office and home. It enables fifty-one scene changes to be made in rapid succession with no connecting narrative voice. Criminality and its consequence – imprisonment – are ever present. Jaggers is as imprisoned by the law in his chambers as are the convicts aboard the ship; and Miss Havisham is incarcerated for life in Satis House. (162–3)

However, the limitations of having only one set – imaginative and supple as it was – meant that the climax on the Thames estuary had to be imagined as much as realised.

So what had to go? Pip's education at the Pockets' was no great loss. But the protracted scenes of his inauguration as a member of the idle rich set, attempting to adopt the airs of a man-about-town, which Dickens evidently despised and which was effortlessly achieved cinematically through montage with voice-over in Lean's film, had to be represented somehow in a single scene which was not in the book. I chose to depict his initiation into the Finches of the Grove, as touched on in Chapter 7, a drinking club for Regency bucks presided over by the handsome and sadistic Bentley Drummle (Oliver Boot, who also neatly doubled as another cruel 'gentleman', Compeyson). If the initiation ceremony bore some resemblance to the alleged rituals of the Bullingdon Club, brought to light in the press of the time… well, that was entirely intentional.

There was no room for Walworth so, with great reluctance, there was no Aged P. Wemmick had to show the two sides of his character not topographically but linguistically: 'Speaking professionally… speaking personally…'. Though we managed to keep Trabb's boy's parody of Pip's incompetent show of gentility as the tailor measures him for his London clothes, the exigencies of production meant that he could not make a reappearance on the High Street, shaming Pip with his declarations of 'Don't know ya!' The Mysterious Stranger brandishing the file in The Three Jolly Bargemen as he slips Pip the two soiled pound notes from Magwitch was, happily, included, but there was neither room nor time to reprise his expository role on the coach down to Rochester.

There were certain scenes, not usually realised in adaptations, that I was determined to keep. Wopsle playing Hamlet was obligatory for me, though it was not easy for Lucy to realise the stage and auditorium of even such a rude theatre with such a limited company. Besides, this scene is not just for comic relief but useful for the contraction of the plot, for it provides an opportunity for Orlick to point Pip out to Compeyson – which will lead the real villain of the piece, Magwitch's nemesis, to track down his old adversary.

Ah, Orlick! How to deal with this brooding, silent, slouching fellow? I have always had trouble with the curious incident of his kidnapping Pip at the sluice

Figure 9.7: ***Two set models of Eaton's 2016 production, set designed by Mike Britton***. Photography by Mike Britton. Copyright Mike Britton, reproduced with permission.

house and the last-minute rescue by Herbert and Trabb's boy. It seems to occur in the wrong place, after the glorious scene of Miss Havisham's conflagration and before the preparations to smuggle 'Provis' out of the country. Many previous adaptations have, understandably, dropped this shifting character altogether, but Pip needs to know that it was Orlick who had acted out Pip's secret desire by attacking his sister. So I took the liberty to shift this revelation to the scene when Orlick is, rather unaccountably, working as the gatekeeper at Satis House, where Pip will finally confront Miss Havisham, when he will at last confess his undying love for Estella, when she will abandon them both to leave with Drummle, when Miss Havisham will beg Pip's forgiveness, when her decaying bridal dress will catch fire, and when Pip will burn his hands vainly attempting to save her.

The hardest question of all: how to end? The story is well-known of how Dickens was persuaded by his friend Bulwer-Lytton to change the original ending.[10] Pip, returned from Egypt, is strolling down Piccadilly when he sees Estella in her carriage:

> I was very glad afterwards to have had the interview; for, in her face and in her voice, and in her touch, she gave me the assurance, that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be. (*GE* 492)

But the rewrite certainly cannot be seen as a straightforward substitution of a 'happy' ending for an 'unhappy' one. The final scene is set in the ruins of Satis House – surely a more appropriate location than a fashionable London thoroughfare. But the melancholic final paragraph, evoking a distant past and an uncertain future, is anything but unambiguously hopeful:

> I took her hand in mine, and as we went out of the ruined place; and as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of the tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her. (358)

That last clause has been agonised over. There is certainly no definite suggestion that their lives will be united. I preserved the setting and the coincidental meeting, but I made one slight change at the very end:

> SCENE 50. EPILOGUE. SATIS HOUSE – DAY.
> *Eleven years later… A misty, moonlit night. Older now, Pip walks into the grounds of Satis House. The building is a shell, the brickwork charred, abandoned since the fire – a ruined fairy-tale castle. A melancholy air might accompany this scene, one of Thomas Moore's Melodies might be appropriate, 'Believe me, if all those endearing young charms'. Pip starts*

as he sees a solitary figure, dressed in mourning, walking through the wreckage. Can it be?

PIP: Estella? Estella!

It is. Estella turns to see him – a tense unexpected yet expectant encounter.

ESTELLA: I wonder you know me. I am greatly changed.

PIP: I would always know you. Strange… after so many years… we should meet again here – Satis House – the place of our first meeting! Do you often come back?

ESTELLA: I have never returned to this place since last I saw you.

PIP: The remembrance of our last meeting has always been painful to me.

ESTELLA: This ground is the only possession I have not relinquished. Everything else has gone from me, little by little. Now Satis House is to be knocked down and my wretched memories destroyed forever.

PIP: Poor old place!

ESTELLA: And you, Pip?

PIP: I've been abroad… for the last dozen or so years.

ESTELLA: Are you doing well?

PIP: I work pretty hard for a sufficient living. I suppose I do well enough.

ESTELLA: Married?

PIP: Me? No, I'm fated to be quite an old bachelor. Your husband…?

ESTELLA: Dead. A blood vessel burst in his head when he was whipping a horse. The Honourable Bentley Drummle always took pleasure in exerting mastery over weaker creatures… *(changing the subject)* I little thought that in taking leave of this spot I would also be taking leave of you. Let us get away from this ruin.

Estella takes Pip's hand – for a moment his heart stirs.

PIP: Must we part again, Estella?

ESTELLA: We are friends, Pip. *(after a pause)* And will continue friends… Apart.

Estella lets go of his hand and walks away. No solution. No consolation. Each condemned to a life sentence in their own individual prison. Pip is left alone.

There is no question of a life together; to me, that is inconceivable. If Pip had been cherishing one final illusion, that must now be abandoned.

Gradually, after far too short a period in the rehearsal room (the most enjoyable time for a writer, who usually has to spend far too long on his own), the

continual chamfering of the text is fixed and final. Then suddenly, after too short a run, the show is over, the applause dies down, the motley sent back to the wardrobe, and, to adopt an image from Thackeray rather than his competitor, the box and the puppets are shut up (*Vanity Fair* 809). The company who have become so close now disperse, perhaps never to meet again. Yet another piece of theatre has been written on water. Yet another version of Dickens's masterpiece has become a thing of memory, while the original continues to live forever.

Endnotes

[1] For a fuller discussion of these illustrations, see Emily Eells, 'From Word to Image: Illustrating *Great Expectations*'. *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2003, pp. 219–39.

[2] See Malcolm Andrews, 'Illustrations', *A Companion to Charles Dickens*. Edited by David Paroissien. Blackwell Publishing, 2008. 97–125.

[3] Leon Litvack has undertaken a reappraisal of Stone in light of his poor reputation among Dickensians; see Leon Litvack, 'Marcus Stone: A Reappraisal of Dickens's Young Illustrator', *Dickens Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2012, pp. 214–50.

[4] See Gareth Cordery, *An Edwardian's View of Dickens and His Illustrators: Harry Furniss's 'A Sketch of Boz'*. ELT Press, 2005.

[5] See Lawrence H. Houtchens, 'Charles Dickens and International Copyright.' *American Literature*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1941, pp. 18–28.

[6] See George J. Worth, '*Great Expectations: A Drama, in Three Stages* (1861).' *Dickens Quarterly*, vol. 3, 1986, pp. 169–75.

[7] This has been analysed by Jean Callaghan in her essay 'The (Unread) Reading Version of Great Expectations', in the *Great Expectations*. Norton Critical Edition, edited by Edgar Rosenberg (1999), pp. 543–55.

[8] Though Gilbert's play was never printed, a transcription from the handwritten copy lodged at the Lord Chamberlain's office is available online, as are the reviews.

[9] See, for example, Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'Mirror-Images in Great Expectations', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* vol. 21, no. 3, 1966, pp. 203–24.

[10] For further discussion of the several endings, see Jerome Meckier, 'Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*: A Defense of the Second Ending', *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1993, pp. 28–58.

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CHAPTER 10

Fictional Dickenses

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Much as Charles Dickens's own characters have appeared in various forms since their textual debuts – as discussed with relation to Miss Havisham in Chapter 4, Rosa Bud in Chapter 5, Little Nell in Chapter 7, and the full cast of *Great Expectations* in Chapter 9 – Dickens himself has been fictionalised in diverse ways throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Some of these appearances are vastly popular among audiences who might not be particularly well versed in the author's works, and do not aim for biographical specificity (for example, Gonzo's turn as the Dickens-narrator in *The Muppet Christmas Carol* [1992], or Simon Callow as Dickens in an episode of *Doctor Who*, 'The Unquiet Dead' [2005]). Others have trod the line between biography and fiction unevenly, being read (and reviewed) as pure biography rather than biofiction, causing dedicated Dickensians some headaches but being popularly received as fact. The line between biofiction and biography has long been blurred: as Michael Lackey notes, one of the foundational definitions of biofiction drawn from Carl Bode's 1955 essay suggests that, 'if a biography is either bad or stylized, then it would qualify as a biographical novel' (Lackey 4); Georg Lukács had said something similar in his 1937 study *The Historical Novel*, suggesting that the subject's 'character is inevitably exaggerated, made to stand on tiptoe, his historical calling unduly emphasized … the personal, the purely psychological and biographical acquire a disproportionate breadth, a false preponderance' (314–21). That the biographical novel might be *too* biographical is a striking claim. So

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too does the question of style and stylisation demand attention. It might not seem overly surprising that biofiction heightens the personal, building its story around the ripples one person might effect on the world around them, much as biography does. What makes the study of fictional Dickenses, much like other adaptations of his texts and characters, of interest is that these representations have been present in the popular imagination for a long time, often coalescing around new discoveries or anniversaries but maintaining a steady presence throughout the last century and contributing – sometimes very consciously and deliberately – to a continual shaping and reshaping of Dickens's legacy.

In the case of Dickens, the aims of biofiction are often set against the context and aims of neo-Victorian fiction: as explored in Chapter 4 and in the work of Cora Kaplan, neo-Victorian texts are characterised by their ability to critique the past but also to apply a contemporary lens. As such, to be too biographical is to ignore the wider demands of a genre that seeks to revise and reformulate our relationship to the past, rather than solidify it. Kaplan suggests Dickens 'stalks his virtual world and makes guest appearances in our own' (81), and this can be understood in two ways: first, Dickens's use, as in *Doctor Who*, as a kind of legitimising figure in representations of the Victorian period, and, in the context of the role of the neo-Victorian, as both commentator and subject of critique for the contemporary world. In the words of Georges Letissier, 'many post-Victorian novels are written *after*, or *against* [Dickens]' (113). In the case of Dickens, this might be stylistically, or an attempt to navigate the difficulties of the author's morality and how it might be brought to bear on his works: his treatment of his wife, Catherine, in their separation in 1858 has come under much biographical and biofictional scrutiny, as has his affair with Ellen Ternan, lasting from around the time of the separation to his death in 1870.[1]

This chapter will not attempt to catalogue exhaustively all of the many biofictional Dickenses that have appeared, but will explore some of the trends in Dickensian biofiction, with a particular focus on the earliest Dickens biofiction, a slight volume titled *The Battle of London Life: Or, Boz and His Secretary* (1849), produced during Dickens's lifetime and little-known since. I will also gesture briefly to the changing face of Dickens in recent years, as a new wave of representations emerges following the bicentenary of Dickens's birth in 2012. Commentators of biofiction trace its rise primarily to the 1960s; as Lackey notes, prior to this (and for some time after), biofiction was interpreted in relation to biography rather than fiction. As such, I will explore how these earlier biofictions interact with contemporaneous approaches to the biographical Dickens.

Cannibalising Dickens

In addition to the more mainstream appearances already mentioned (to which we might also add Ralph Fiennes's turn as Dickens in the 2013 film *The Invisible*

Woman, an adaptation of Claire Tomalin's biography of the same name), Dickens has also appeared as a character in several lesser-known novels and plays, including (but not limited to): a Mills and Boon novel published in 1928 called *This Side Idolatry* by 'Ephesian', otherwise known as C.E. Bechhofer Roberts, in which the long-suffering Catherine Dickens finally gets to say what is on her mind and accuses her husband of 'cant' and 'hypocrisy' (*This Side Idolatry* 319); *The Master of Gadshill: Dickens Returns to Youth. A Drama in Three Acts*, performed in 1935, in which Dickens falls in love with a woman named Dora Spenlow (named after the character from *David Copperfield* [1850]), but is not able to marry her; novels by W.V.Y. Dale (*I Rest My Claims*, 1948) and Hebe Elsna (*Consider These Women*, 1954, and *Unwanted Wife: A Defence of Mrs Charles Dickens*, 1963), within which the writers are similarly primarily concerned with Catherine Dickens; *Girl in a Blue Dress* by Gaynor Arnold (2008) (which is tenuously described as biofiction, given that Dickens and his wife are transformed into Alfred and Dorothea Gibson, aligning Catherine almost as much with the Dorothea of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* [1871] as her biographical counterpart); *Wanting* by Richard Flanagan (2008), which, among other things, looks at the influence of the Franklin expedition on Dickens; *Drood* by Dan Simmons (2009); *The Last Dickens* by Matthew Pearl (2009);[2] Dickens as a non-playable character in the videogame *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (2015), in which he forms 'The Ghost Club' and gives tasks to the assassins to complete; *The Murder of Patience Brooke* (2014) by J. C. Briggs, and its sequels, in which Dickens solves crimes; and *Death and Mr Pickwick* by Stephen Jarvis (2014), which explores his relationship with the original *Pickwick* artist, Robert Seymour.[3] Among these contrasting and varied texts, three central themes emerge.

First, the issue of Dickens's relationships with women forms the troubled centre of several of these biofictions, and Dickens is rarely depicted in a positive light. In the 1920s and 1930s, as rumours about Dickens's affair with Ellen Ternan surfaced, aided by Thomas Wright's biography of Dickens (published in 1935 but compiled earlier), biofiction centred on his romantic relationships with women: as mentioned, *This Side Idolatry* permitted Catherine to confront Dickens in a way that she never has, before or since, in biography. A selection of Dickens's correspondence with Maria Beadnell, his first love, was published in America in 1908 by the Boston Bibliophile Society. An English edition would not appear until 1934, after the last of Dickens's children had died, and was followed in 1935 by a three-act play, *The Master of Gadshill: Dickens Returns to Youth*, which used the letters as inspiration.

Dickens met Beadnell in 1830, before his literary career had even begun; he was only 18. She was the daughter of a banker and he was a promising young reporter, first at Doctor's Common Courts and later a reporter of parliamentary debates. Dickens was passionately in love, writing her bad poetry and declaring his love for her, but the tentative relationship came to an end in 1833, perhaps because her parents viewed him as too young (he was two years her junior) or in light of his father's pecuniary embarrassments. She is often suggested to be

the inspiration for David Copperfield's first wife, Dora Spenlow; the 1908 edition reinforced this connection with the half-title 'Charles Dickens and Maria Beadnell ("Dora")'. Beadnell died in 1886, but the letters remained private until the 1908 American edition.

The subsequent delay in the publication of Dickens's letters in England was largely due to the actions of Georgina Hogarth, Dickens's sister-in-law. Arthur A. Adrian describes a range of incidents in the same vein, including Hogarth, positioned by Adrian as the 'Guardian of the Beloved Memory', writing to Thomas Wright to ask him not to publish what he had learned about Dickens's relationship with Ellen (239), and her publication of a newspaper statement saying that Dickens had never known the Duke of Portland in response to the notorious Druce trial (239–40), in which Mary Ann Robinson claimed to have known Dickens and to have been introduced to the duke by him. Hogarth had a particular investment in Dickens's letters and strong views about what should be made public and what should be kept private, having become the proprietor of Dickens's papers under the terms of his will and having published a carefully edited and censored edition of his letters, together with his eldest daughter, Mamie, in 1880.[4] However, Hogarth had died in 1917, and, with the publication of the Beadnell letters and Wright's damning biography, the shape of Dickens biofiction had radically altered.

The 1935 play in which Dickens falls in love with Dora Spenlow was clearly influenced by Dickens's relationship with Beadnell and the publication of the letters. Both of them are relationships that predate his connection with Catherine Hogarth, and in both cases he meets his love again, many years later. In reality, Dickens was disappointed by the way that Beadnell had changed in the 24 years since he had last seen her, and she was satirised in the 'diffuse and silly' Flora Finching of *Little Dorrit* (150). Maria, by this time Mrs Henry Winter, contacted Dickens in 1855 and they met secretly without their respective spouses. In spite of Maria warning Dickens that she had aged, he seems to have been dramatically disappointed in their meeting, expecting her to have been unchanged. Although they did meet again, *with* their spouses, Dickens avoided further intimacy with her. The meeting in the play is similarly uncomfortable:

> DICKENS
> Let me explain. – As Mrs. Hedstone, you are a very bewitching woman; but it was the vision of Dora Spenlow that enchanted me. Do I make myself quite clear?
>
> DORA
> Oh yes, quite clear. I'm no longer the Dora of eighteen; and now the woman of forty is almost a stranger.
>
> DICKENS
> Not a stranger. … Just a reminder that youth doesn't last forever. (*The Master of Gadshill* 98)

Dora offers to have an affair with Dickens, who turns her down. As such, she threatens to publish 'Dora's Resurrection', to tell her side of the story (note too that she is married to a man named Hedstone, who is jealous of the relationship, modelled after the jealous lover Bradley Headstone of *Our Mutual Friend* [1865]). While the play moves the focus to the women around Dickens, it seems more concerned with vindicating him: he turns down Dora, and seeks only friendship from a young, beautiful, blonde prostitute named Caroline Bronson whom he finds injured in the street. Dickens is very much the chivalrous hero of the play, seduced by the prospect of a glimpse of the past but ultimately gallant and appropriate in the present.

The anxiety over letters and blackmail also speaks to the Dickens family's concerns at this time about controlling the publication of letters and biographical accounts. *This Side Idolatry* was vigorously defended by its author: Dickens's son Henry was 'worried to death' about its publication, seeing it as a 'challenge' to him (Storey, note 9 September 1928): this speaks to biofiction's close alignment to biography at that time, and the power it was thought to hold. The press also asked to have Henry's 'answer' to the author to publish. Though it is clear that the line between biofiction and biography was particularly thin during the 1920s and 1930s, the issue of Dickens and women recurs in biofiction of the 1950s, 1960s, 1990s and 2000s. Dickens's treatment of women, also addressed in Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 7 of this volume, is a topic that cannot be fully resolved. The play attempts, in an admittedly unmasterful way, to capture the different sides of Dickens's relationships with women through the figures of Dora and Caroline. His dismissal of Dora, no longer young and beautiful, echoes Dickens's repeated use of such dollish young women in his fiction, but his redemptive friendship with Caroline captures another Dickens: the social reformer, friend of the poor. Part of the interest in the Dickens women is also an interest in author's circles and spheres of influence, whether familial, literary, or broader, which I will now turn to in connecting to other trends in Dickens biofiction.

The second and third threads both deal with anxieties around influence. Firstly, Dickensian biofiction seems to take an extraordinarily literal approach to Dickens's influences. The 1935 play, although it took its cues from the newly published letters, imagined Dickens *knowing* Dora Spenlow – not someone *like* her but her herself. Imaginative uses of Dickens do not credit Dickens with much imagination, and this has been more or less consistent across the decades and centuries. The 1849 biofiction *The Battle of London Life* also shows Dickens's reliance on real-life events, while in the video game *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* you assassinate a *James* Jasper who has gone mad (and who has a nephew called *Edward*, mirroring John Jasper and Edwin Drood), and the character of Dickens tells you that he wants to adapt the story into a novel. Even the *Doctor Who* storyline built around Dickens credits his experience as the Doctor's sidekick with reviving his enthusiasm and inspiring the creation of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), while a further episode of the series set in Victorian

London involves a megalosaurus walking the streets, using the powerful opening image of *Bleak House* (1853) ('As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn-hill' [11]) to both legitimise Victorian London and play with the boundaries of fiction and reality. One of Dickens's most powerful images is thus literalised, and Dickens's genius is reduced to observation rather than imaginative creation.

As well as what may have influenced Dickens, later biofiction seems particularly concerned with the dangers of influence. As I have explored for the *Journal of Victorian Culture Online* (2015), Jarvis's *Death and Mr Pickwick* was received with some indignation because of its suggestion that Dickens drove Seymour to suicide over the *Pickwick* illustrations. This sparked some strong reactions in the Dickensian community, which centred on appropriate commemoration of the anniversary of Dickens's death and emphasis on Dickens's heroic actions at the Staplehurst rail crash. Jarvis's book, based on his own research but fictionalised into an engaging detective novel, pictures the young Charles Dickens as an ambitious bully and thief, manipulating illustrator Robert Seymour and eventually resulting in his suicide, and then obscuring Seymour's role in creating *The Pickwick Papers* (1836). For some, Jarvis's book forms part of a recent trend of publications denigrating Dickens, otherwise known as 'Dickens bashing'.

What do we mean by Dickens bashing? For those who find Jarvis's work problematic, the issue lies in the perception that there is a tendency in recent years to ignore all the good of Dickens's work for social reform, his philanthropy and the excellence of his novels in favour of personal attacks on his character. However, Dickens bashing is not a recent trend. Although the last decade has seen several publications that look at the darker side of his character (such as Lillian Nayder's *The Other Dickens* [2011], a biography of Dickens's wife, Catherine, that highlights his unfair treatment of her), Dickens's affair was not the great secret, even during his life, that many have thought. Patrick Leary's 'How the Dickens Scandal Went Viral' (2013) describes American rumours about Dickens's split from Catherine, showing that Ellen Ternan's name appeared in American newspapers in connection to Dickens in the late 1850s. In Britain, her name was mostly hidden until the early 20th century and the appearance of a spate of biographies and accounts from the 1930s onwards. Biographer Thomas Wright had begun his research in the 1890s, though he did not publish his controversial *Life of Charles Dickens* until 1935, after the last of Dickens's children had died and those personally involved were long gone. Following on Wright's heels, Gladys Storey's *Dickens and Daughter* (1939) was a revealing biography of Dickens and his daughter Kate. As such, there is a cluster of biographical and biofictional accounts appearing in the 1930s, following on from the publication of *This Side Idolatry* in 1928.

Bechhofer Roberts had been a contributing writer for the *Dickensian* magazine, and was connected to the Dickens Fellowship, itself dedicated to promoting and preserving Dickens and Dickens scholarship. He had written biographies of Winston Churchill and Lord Birkenhead – significantly biographies, not biofiction. *This Side Idolatry* was something different, but confusion was, unsurprisingly, fostered by its advertisement as a new book by a known biographer. The novel begins much like any biography, outlining Dickens's birth and childhood. The young Charles's ambition quickly becomes central, and his need for admiration and his weakness for adulation are highlighted. Throughout the novel, Dickens's self-love, his callous treatment of his wife, and his insecurities are the focus. The novel culminates in an (entirely fictional) argument between Dickens and his wife, Catherine, in which she finally accuses him of the cant and hypocrisy that he has set his career against. At the novel's close, we are told that John Forster, Dickens's friend and first key biographer in the 1870s, 'established the tradition that Charles, the Inimitable Boz, had ever shown himself in his life as in his work the uncompromising foe of Cant, Hypocrisy and Humbug. Kate still kept her silence' (319). The book highlights the central role of biography in forming reputation, while also eschewing the form.

The heyday of Dickens bashing, then, would seem to be the 1920s and 1930s, spurred on by the thinning numbers of Dickens's immediate family and closest friends who would – and could – defend the author's name, considering that he had died over 50 years before. A response to *This Side Idolatry*, published in the *Dickensian*, gave this cutting reply: 'For our own part, in making an estimate of the personal character of Dickens, we prefer to pin our faith to the opinions of those who met him in daily concourse; only such opinions count' (1). Unfortunately for those keen to preserve Dickens's reputation, another challenger, Gladys Storey's *Dickens and Daughter*, was based on interviews with someone who knew Dickens better than most. In this account, we hear about daughter Kate's 'poor, poor mother' and the existence of an illegitimate child fathered by Dickens. Although Kate expressed her love for her father, through her we see that he was a deeply flawed man. The Dickensians who had held to the 'true' accounts given by Dickens's family and friends now had a problem, and the *Dickensian* response was that the book 'showed Mrs. Perugini in a not very worthy light' (Ley 250). Kate's account was set against those given by her siblings, and the conclusion was that, weighing up the evidence, 'It does not ring true' (253). Dickens's own daughter was discounted, because she contradicted the image that the Dickens Fellowship had been working to maintain since its creation in 1902, and that the family had been striving to establish for decades before. Thus, Dickens bashing is certainly not a 20th- or 21st-century invention; its roots can be found at least as far back as George Henry Lewes's infamous article 'Dickens in Relation to Criticism' (1872), and the third volume of Forster's *Life* (1874) is characterised by its attempted defence of Dickens – from Lewes, from the French critic H. A. Taine, and from public condemnation of the end of his marriage.

Continuing the trend of biofictional accounts concerned with influence, Simmons's *Drood* explores the difficult relationship between Dickens and Wilkie Collins against a backdrop of Dickens's obsession with a supernatural figure named 'Drood' who also infects Wilkie's life following the Staplehurst railway disaster of 1865. The story is told by Collins himself, an unreliable narrator influenced by opium. The plot hinges on mesmeric influence, drawing from Dickens's own experiences, with clear ramifications for Collins's own writing. There is the implicit suggestion that Dickens has furnished, both through the events of Simmons's novel and through his manipulations, the plot of *The Moonstone* in Collins's mind.[5] Both men are characterised by modes of literary creation that are heavily reliant on experience: for example, Dickens and Collins work with a Detective Hatchery, who becomes Collins's inspiration for *The Moonstone*'s (1868) Sergeant Cuff ('"A privately employed detective," I muttered. The idea had wonderful possibilities' [Simmons 67]), while the name 'Hatchery' itself echoes the 'Datchery' of *Edwin Drood*. Imagination is portrayed as dangerous; the climax of the novel is a dream sequence in which Collins murders his famous friend. Dickens is, once again, positioned as a sinister manipulator in his relationship with his friend and collaborator.

Another way to conceive of these threads is as a preoccupation with *cannibalising* Dickens. *Drood* and the 2008 novel *Wanting* invoke Dickens's defence of the Franklin expedition and refutation of the charges of cannibalism levelled against the explorers directly,[6] but there are also several different senses at play here: first to make Dickens into a villain, a cannibal himself; second to suggest he cannibalises his friends and his life in his fiction, often cruelly (as in the case of Maria Beadnell); and thirdly the authors of biofiction cannibalising Dickens's works and his life in their own fiction, attempting to draw out the vital organs of the Dickensian Dickens. In this search for the crux of Dickens – as a man, as an author, and as a biographical or fictional subject – many seem to take up the same theme, that of the importance for Dickens of *consuming* the life around him. This idea that Dickens is consuming life, most often in the sense that he is writing about what he observes, is made darkly comic and disturbing in Martin McDonagh's 2018 play, *A Very Very Very Dark Matter*, which renders the imperialism of the Victorian period very literally in having Dickens and Hans Christian Andersen force two imprisoned Congolese women to write their works. The play itself is merciless in its satirisation of these two canonical writers, but the revelation that these women are time travellers (who have come to attempt to prevent the atrocities committed in the Congo from 1885 to 1908) problematises the act of literary creation: did they remember the novels from the future and recreate them, or is there something modern about the stories themselves, brought back in time? (Though, admittedly, the play does not take on these issues itself, instead presenting a postcolonial jab at the problematic inheritances and legacies of the British canon.)

Influence, genius, imagination

The Battle of London Life: Or, Boz and His Secretary (1849), as the first Dickens biofiction, is revealing in how it approaches these questions of influence. The title is obviously punning on Dickens's 1846 story *The Battle of Life*, immediately paralleling the fictional with the biographical. The author, Thomas O'Keefe, was an Irish captain rather than an established biographer or fiction writer, while George Augustus Sala, who would go on to have a close working relationship with Dickens as contributor to his journals *Household Words* and *All The Year Round*, provided the illustrations. The story itself shows Dickens moving from the 'Ideal' to the 'Natural' in his writing, because of the influence of his amanuensis, a strangely off-putting character who turns out to be a police inspector in disguise investigating Dickens's involvement with the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini; Dickens had written 'An Appeal to the English People on Behalf of the Italian Refugees' in 1849, and became publicly identified with the Italian cause at this time. There are a series of stories-within-the-story, including, interestingly, a story of brotherly vengeance involving a married couple called Charles and Catherine.

Biofiction of a living author in the Victorian period is rather rare, and this text is all the more striking for Dickens's own reticence to share details of his life; a short piece identified as the first biographical notice of Dickens to appear, 'Life of Boz' (*Town*, August 1840), suggests his life was 'perfectly smooth' (1358) and that his career 'has been altogether unchequered by those numberless rubs of fortune, those changes and chances which rarely fail to wait on the footsteps of those who reap a precarious subsistence from the pen' (1358). This is captured by another piece, which is a sort of speculative anti-biofiction: Nathaniel Hawthorne's sketch 'P.'s Correspondence' (1845), which imagines that Dickens had died young, before finishing *The Pickwick Papers* (meanwhile, Lord Byron and Napoleon Bonaparte are still living). The few sentences on Dickens's lost potential conclude that 'Not impossibly the world has lost more than it dreams of by the untimely death of this Mr. Dickens' (416–17). After his death, it would become known that he had worked in a factory (briefly) as a child, but, in the 1840s, Dickens was still in the early years of his fame and forging his identity as a novelist.[7]

Revelations about Dickens's childhood experience crystallised how his imaginative powers were viewed: Robert Buchanan in his article 'The "Good Genie" of Fiction: Thoughts while Reading Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*' for *St Paul's Magazine* (February 1872) took the incident and turned it into the shaping influence of the author's life, suggesting that Dickens's 'odd' view of life was a result of his childhood experience: 'It may seem putting the case too strongly, but Charles Dickens, having crushed into his childish experience a whole world of sorrow and humorous insight, so loaded his soul that he never grew any older' (579). This is fairly typical of the shape of Dickensian criticism

and psychoanalysis towards the end of the 19th century, and biographies often highlight the author's powers of observation, for example Forster's claim that Dickens was 'keenly observant', uniting this with 'touches of humorous fancy' (816) or Sala's later claim that he 'look[ed] seemingly neither to the right nor the left, but of a surety looking at and into everything – now at the myriad aspects of London life, the ever-changing raree-show, the endless round-about' (9). This vision of Dickens, the observer of minute detail and the scribe of urban life, is reflected in J.C. Briggs's *The Murder of Patience Brooke*, where Dickens becomes a Holmes-esque detective. Those biographical hints become exaggerated into the driver for the story, perhaps taking cues from Dickens's own demonstrated attentiveness to the minutest of details, as explored in Chapter 11 of this volume. In the 1840s, however, Dickens is positioned as needing lessons and instruction in observation.

Early in *The Battle of London Life*, Phillipson, Boz's secretary, says to Dickens:

> 'You have written many tales … but you must pardon me if I give it as my opinion, that your characters – powerfully and graphically drawn as the *major part of them are* – are still not drawn from nature. They have more of *romance* than *reality* about them. In a word, they are the result, not of the study of living types, but rather of a rich invention, and prurient imagination. … [I]f you choose to put yourself under my guidance I can show you many curious specimens of our species; you are a clever workman, I can enable you to strike a new, and hitherto unexplored, vein of ore; in short, to take a stride from the *Ideal* to the NATURAL!' (23–4, emphasis in original)

Where to start with this? There is the patronising approach to Dickens's characters ('the major part' of which are powerful and graphic, to say nothing of the rest) as well as the implicit suggestion that Dickens's *plots* are better than his characters – an unusual stance at any time, in light of the prominence of writing serially in the period. The positioning of authorship as somehow collaborative, something the whole text proposes in having Dickens have a secretary or amanuensis in the first place, is also notable. Dickens's romantic self-creation as a kind of lone genius and the enduring cultural image of eminent authors as fitting this mould was also reinforced by accounts written by Dickens's family later in the century, which often made it clear that he generally did his writing alone and could not be disturbed. This positioning of Dickens functions on several levels, not only to ensure Dickens meets expectations of authorship but also to present him as a male writer of a certain class.[8] However, his daughter Mamie was on one occasion, when taken ill, permitted to be in her father's study while he was writing. This is how she describes him:

> [M]y father wrote busily and rapidly at his desk, when he suddenly jumped from his chair and rushed to a mirror which hung near, and in which I could see the reflection of some extraordinary facial contortions which he was making. He returned rapidly to his desk, wrote furiously for a few moments, and then went again to the mirror. The facial pantomime was resumed, and then turning toward, but evidently not seeing, me, he began talking rapidly in a low voice … he had actually become in action, as in imagination, the creature of his pen. (*My Father as I Recall Him* 48–9)

Mamie's description of her father's writing process resonates with the idea of a 'prurient' imagination and 'rich invention', and contrasts with the passive Dickens of *The Battle of London Life*. O'Keefe's suggestion that Dickens's imagination is excessive does, to some extent, also speak to criticisms of Dickens – particularly later ones. Lewes's 'Dickens in Relation to Criticism' describes Dickens's imagination as 'approaching … closely to hallucination' (144). As mentioned, Forster, in his biography of Dickens, felt the need to directly address Lewes's criticisms, as well as those of Taine, who described Dickens's imagination as 'a string too tightly stretched; it produces of itself, without any violent shock, sounds not otherwise heard' (2:343). To defend against this conception of Dickens's imagination as excessive and hallucinatory, Forster gives instances where Dickens drew directly on events in his life, as in creating the characters of Miss Mowcher and Harold Skimpole. His revelations about Dickens's childhood have been used to read Dickens's fiction biographically – and psychologically – ever since, and excesses in Dickens's character are explained by Forster as consequences of his early experience at Warren's Blacking Factory. As such, the roots of the biofictional focus on Dickens as very literally inspired by the world around him are meta-biographical: although there are obvious parallels between Dickens's fiction and Dickens's life, the need to emphasise a sense of reality over the excesses of imagination is the project of Dickens biography itself in reclaiming the author from the kinds of criticisms that arose in the mid to late 19th century.

Similarly, Sala's 1870 book about Dickens, the first biographical text to be published after his death (appearing as a yellowback in July 1870), also emphasised Dickens's way of 'looking at and into everything' (9):

> The pictures he drew were clearly not imaginary, for no sooner were they drawn than all the world recognized their amazing vividness and veracity, and only wondered that such scenes had not occurred to them before: and herein his greatness as an artist was conspicuous; for it is one of the distinctive privileges of genius to utter thoughts and to portray objects which at once appear to us obvious and familiar, but of which no definite idea or impression had hitherto been presented to our minds. (30)

Sala had not known Dickens when he illustrated *The Battle of London Life* (and later claimed to have forgotten that he had been involved with the book at all), but his description seems almost to unite the two problems: Dickens is both drawing on life and also imbuing it with a kind of greatness. This is much closer to the meaning of 'Ideal' that O'Keefe is referencing, and also echoes several readings that position Dickens's imagination as a way of viewing the world. Taylor Stoehr synthesises several approaches, drawing a distinction between any possible understanding of Dickens's own perception and the ways in which he narrated the world, while Harry Stone has written that 'By the time Dickens emerged from the blacking warehouse, he could no more extract the magical from his vision of the world than he could divorce his eyes from seeing or his ears from hearing' (69); he adds that 'Everything he wrote filtered through that fanciful vision' (70).

Going back to the quotation, the 'Ideal', we are told earlier in the text, refers to Edward Bulwer-Lytton's conception of it, expressed in 'To The Ideal', the prefatory poem to his 1834 text *The Pilgrims of the Rhine* (Lytton in fact rewrote the poem for later editions as 'The Ideal World', claiming that the original 'had all the worst faults of the author's earliest compositions in verse' [x]). Lytton's original poem frames 'The Ideal' as an escape from the real, 'gladdening all things' (line 10). The rewritten poem focuses this on a picture of a pastoral, Edenic, ideal world, and explores its connection to literature and memory. Both the original and the revision are rather overwrought poems: Bulwer-Lytton seems to have been very concerned that people had got the wrong idea, and has explanatory sections to demystify the argument of the poem and the message of each stanza in subsequent editions. Although some aspects of Dickens's works are undoubtedly sentimental, to align him with a religiously inspired sense of romance is strikingly odd – although it perhaps invokes the title's referent, *The Battle of Life*.

It is, in addition, necessary to the story, which is built around Dickens's writer's block: in that sense, *Boz and His Secretary* is not that different from other kinds of biofiction. In order to establish a central narrative problem, Dickens's life is, perhaps unsurprisingly, treated very loosely. This was particularly important prior to Forster's biography, because of that assumption, captured by the *Town* biographical notice, that Dickens had an easy life: appearing before the revelations made in Forster's biography appeared in 1872, Sala's 1870 account claimed 'There are very few "adventures" to record in the life of Charles Dickens' (48). Rather than dealing with known biography in depth, telling the story of Dickens's life as we know it, all of the discussed texts shift the focus away from Dickens, panning left and right to a wider circle of friends and family, both fictional and real; this would seem to contrast Lukács's claim that biofiction disproportionately emphasises the subject, although the question of Dickens's influence, and those rippling effects of the life of the individual, remain. In addition, just as *This Side Idolatry* and *The Master of Gadshill* capture

anxieties around what might be published about an author more than 50 years after his death, *Boz and His Secretary* can also be read in the context of the wider social concerns of the 1840s, notably anxieties about the police force. The detective branch of the police in Britain was only formed in 1842, and the police were viewed by the populace as corrupt and suspect. Anxieties around European influence and the Italian revolution also feed into this distrust of a specifically European model of policing, and so Dickens's strangely repulsive amanuensis, manipulating the author, speaks to this bigger picture of societal change. Just as writings of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s were produced against a backdrop of biographical revelations about Ellen Ternan, *Boz and His Secretary* is concerned with 1840s anxieties surrounding knowledge, influence, and detection; this can be further aligned with the increased public consumption of biography. As literary celebrity started to take hold of the public imagination, an insatiable appetite for details of authors' lives began to grow. This became a significant feature in the periodical press and literary culture more broadly, as seen in the proliferation of celebrity interviews and the increasing popularity of the 'celebrity' lecture tour in the mid to late 19th century.

Celebrity relationships are one-sided, with the object of adulation largely passive, and certainly operating in entirely different circles from those seeking greater intimacy with their idols. As such, there's also something suggestive in the idea of Dickens as a non-player character, first expressed by Kamilla Elliott in talking about *Assassin's Creed* in her keynote 'Dickens After Dickens' (2016) at the 'After Dickens' conference that this edited collection stems from. Dickens is someone with whom these stories interact and intersect, rather than the focus. He is in many ways a celebrity presence, a touchstone, a constant, that brings an authority to the story – in *The Battle of London Life* he acts as a witness, while in *Assassins Creed* he helps to establish that we are in a particular kind of *Victorian* London, and brings with him the cultural and historical associations we expect from that setting. The Dickens of *Boz and His Secretary* faints, gasps, and observes, just as the Dickens of *Assassin's Creed* only exists to act as a cheerleader and taskmaster for the player. Dickens observes, Dickens instructs, and Dickens manipulates, but these stories are more concerned with the other side of the conversation (who is observed? Who is instructed? And who is manipulated?). Dickens remains at the centre, in all cases, but the texts ripple outwards and the narrative follows the ripples.

In the case of *Boz and His Secretary*, it is not just Dickens's fiction that is affected by his life, but also vice versa, and this similarly removes his agency as author. The story resolves by biographically reading Dickens's fiction back onto him:

> [S]uch had been the effect of Mr. Phillipson's tutelage on the delicate cerebral organisation of our hero, that he has been since, to all intents and purposes, A HAUNTED MAN! (101)

This rather unsubtle final gesture to Dickens's 1848 text might suggest the success of Phillipson's method in the short story; in any case, it makes Dickens a subject of his own fiction. In *Drood*, we are left with the possibility that Dickens's manipulations led to *The Moonstone*, turning anxieties about authorship and influence into tangible effect, while the suggestion of *The Master of Gadshill* is that Dickens's characters might write their own stories ('Dora's Resurrection'). In the case of *The Battle of London Life*, it is significant, perhaps, that Dickens's series of articles on the police, including 'On Duty with Inspector Field', would not be published until the 1850s, allowing for the short story to anticipate life (though it is unlikely that Dickens ever read it). Again, the 'cerebral delicacy' of Dickens here can be read in the context of comments about his imagination that would not rise to the surface of Dickensian criticism for another 20 years. As such, what might appear to be a slight biofictional text is powerfully suggestive in its positioning of Dickens, anticipating the concerns of a form that would only be fully realised a century later.

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By creating imagined, heightened climactic events, each of the fictional Dickenses presents a challenge to the biographical Dickens: the earliest diminishes Dickens's own imaginative powers by focusing on external influences, for example, while in the 20th and 21st centuries authors and filmmakers have created conversations and scenes that seek to do justice to Catherine Dickens and Ellen Ternan by rewriting Dickens's biography and legacy. These fictional Dickenses can be brought into conversation with Dickensian biography and criticism in revealing ways, and the interplay of biofiction and biography continues to evolve as the broader trends adapt to changing times.

The relevance of Dickens today was well captured by the Dickens Museum's 2017 exhibition, *Restless Shadow: Dickens the Campaigner*, the exhibition explicitly drawing connections between Dickens's charitable work and contemporary concerns, highlighting the author's legacy with particular charities including the Hospital for Sick Children (now Great Ormond Street Hospital), the Foundling Hospital, and the Artists' Benevolent Fund. Considering the political turmoil of the world today, the focus on this link between Dickens's social reform efforts and modern concerns is unsurprising. Perhaps more surprising is the lack of political themes and resonances in media representations of Dickens in 2017 and since, including Dickens's appearance as a character in the 19th-century medical comedy *Quacks* (BBC, 2017) and the film based on Les Standiford's book *The Man Who Invented Christmas* (Rhombus Media, 2017). Both representations are comedic in tone. In *Quacks*, Dickens is a Byronic, troubled hero experimenting with drink and drugs, and the punch line is his plagiarism of one of the main character's ideas for his famous article on executions. *The Man Who Invented Christmas*, meanwhile, blends together Dickens's life with scenes from *A Christmas Carol*. The film is notable for its representation of Dickens's writing process, showing him in conversation with

his characters in a way that harks back to Mamie's account of him performing in front of the mirror (*My Father as I Recall Him*, 48–9). It is a lively account of Dickens as a writer that stands in stark contrast to the very literal inspiration presented by the examples discussed here, though it too highlights the biographical significance of the novel, with the film's climax seeing Dickens himself presented as Scrooge-like in his relationship with his family. The film takes its own liberties with the subject, positioning Dickens as a pioneer of self-publishing – a very contemporary concern, in the age of Amazon self-publishing – and presenting 1843 as a moment of crisis for Dickens, who is depicted as suffering from writers' block.

Consequently, Dickens is still being re-represented in ways that fulfil and subvert audience expectations, reflecting contemporary concerns though, strikingly, largely avoiding the implications of the political, radical Dickens. His role as a legitimising force in neo-Victorian rewritings and the need to write *against* Dickens in applying a lens of critique to the past stands at odds with the biographical Dickens. Nevertheless, Dickensian biofictions largely resist a flattening of his character by exploring his wider social relationships, offering the potential for new readings and new fictional Dickenses. Just as the chapters in this volume represent a diverse spectrum of ways to read, respond to, and revisit Dickens after Dickens, the media and the public have continued to interrogate Dickens's significance: 150 years after his death, we are still finding new ways to write and remember.

Endnotes

[1] For a discussion of this interplay between the morality of the author's life and work, see Julia Novak and Sandra Mayer, 'Disparate Images: Literary Heroism and the "Work vs. Life" Topos in Contemporary Biofictions about Victorian Authors', *Neo-Victorian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2014, pp. 25–51.

[2] For a nuanced analysis of Dickens's representation in this text and how it challenges the focus in Dickens biofiction on the author and his works through a focus on Dickens's reading tours in America, see José Viera, 'Our Famous Friend: Analysing Charles Dickens as a Pioneering (Literary) Celebrity in Matthew Pearl's *The Last Dickens* (2009)', *Persistence and Resistance in English Studies: New Research*. Edited by Sara Martin, David Owen and Elisabet Pladevall-Ballester, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, 78–87.

[3] This is a continually-expanding list. However, Michael Slater has also summarised several biofictional accounts (see 'Biography of Dickens, Fictional Treatment of.' *The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens*. Anniversary Edition. Edited by Paul Schlicke. Oxford UP, 2012. 44–45.

[4] The will is presented in its entirety in John Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* (857–61).

[5] See Fred Kaplan, *Dickens and Mesmerism: The Hidden Springs of Fiction*. Princeton UP, 1975.

[6] See Ian R. Stone, '"The Contents of the Kettles": Charles Dickens, John Rae and Cannibalism on the 1845 Franklin Expedition', *Dickensian*, vol. 82, 1987, pp. 7–16.

[7] See Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist*, Harvard UP, 2011.

[8] See John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, Yale UP, 1999, for exploration of masculinity and the role of the study.

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CHAPTER 11

Waiting, for Dickens

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> Perhaps because I have always had such a weak ego, always felt myself inferior to all others, in every situation … the worst for me are waiters, since their role is so obviously to serve and be there to please.
>
> (Karl Ove Knausgaard, *My Struggle: Book 6. The End*)

> One day she entered a room where he was sitting with his eyes turned toward an open novel. She said 'Waiting'.
>
> (Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*)

> [H]is appearance … was in all respects a great disappointment. It is a sort of mixture of the *waiter* and the actor, Frenchified in his dress to a degree quite disagreeable.
>
> (John Tulloch on Dickens as a reader)

Waiters appear in all of Dickens's novels, in many of his letters, and often in his journalism. They condense, in their seemingly marginal presence and through their interactions with more 'major' characters, a great deal of Dickens's understanding of social relationships, particularly concerning questions of money, class, gentility, and power. They raise metaphysical questions too, for waiting (and the figure of the waiter in particular) has a distinctive relationship to

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time. It is no accident that the single most famous passage and example in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, a text deeply concerned with time and temporality, is about a waiter, whose 'movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid' (82). Sartre's waiter, it seems, is slightly out of time, a little ahead of where he should be. He is also, for Sartre, the epitome of bad faith, someone caught perpetually between authenticity and inauthenticity, between playing a role and being an authentic self. A waiter, ventriloquises Sartre, 'can be he only in the neutralised mode, as the actor is Hamlet, by mechanically making the *typical gestures* of my state' (83). The waiter is Sartre's archetypal modern person, typical of a generalised condition of inauthenticity, but he is also a worker, not a passer-by, friend, or acquaintance. And he does a particular kind of work – not in a factory or a mine, nor domestic work nor childcare, but a characteristic 'service' job of the modern economy, as performative as it is precarious, always waiting, never quite on time. In Sartre's description:

> He comes toward the customers with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the client. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight-rope walker, by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually reestablishes by a light movement of the arm and hand. All his behavior seems to us a game. (82)

Sartre sees the waiter as characterised by exaggeration and excess, akin to an automaton in his movements: unstable and vulnerable but also performative, playful, and theatrical. It is a surprisingly Dickensian moment to find in a lengthy mid-20th-century work of existential philosophy, but perhaps not so surprising, for Dickens too is interested in waiters and what we might learn from them about time, labour, and the performance of the self in the modern world.

It is often assumed that readers always come after texts: first there is writing, then publication, then reading. But many texts, including Dickens's, have a more complex relationship to the time of reading than this. Serial publication, for example, necessitates reading in instalments, hardwiring intervals of waiting – anticipation, endurance, distraction – into its structure. Reading, though, is not just a matter of waiting for the next novel or the next instalment, which we trust will appear on time and in place. For Dickens's work constantly incites us to be attentive readers, alive to every gesture and movement of his texts. Good readers wait *on* texts, carefully reading their signs, patiently attentive to their desires. Waiting on a text, though, is both motivated and undermined by waiting *for* the text: readers attend to texts in the hope of understanding their meanings through structures of motivated revelation over time. Such

meanings are necessarily deferred; texts never deliver the plenitude of meaning they promise but instead displace their readers along unfinalisable structures of linguistic difference. We cannot simply say that we come 'after Dickens' because his texts remain both ahead and behind us, displaced and displacing themselves and their readers, phoneme by phoneme, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter, book by book, in processes and within structures that are not docile to conventional temporal ordering. We are destined to wait, in short, both on and for Dickens; his own work may be a helpful guide to how we might do so.

My friend the waiter

From the beginning to the end of his writing life, Dickens was curious about, even fascinated by, waiters. In his fiction, journalism, and other writing there is a constant process and project of noticing their speech and behaviour. He portrayed them as sometimes intimidating, often touching, and usually very funny. This marks him out from many other writers of this period, to whom waiters, even more often than domestic servants, seem invisible or merely functional. Dickens, by contrast, was intrigued by waiters' behaviour and the ways that their lives, personalities, pleasures, and pains were revealed in their work and language, in the expressiveness of their mannerisms, rituals, quirks, and resistances. He was interested in both what waiters had in common and how they were different from each other and from their customers. Much of his understanding of society – its power relations, its rituals, and its hospitality – is distilled in his waiter figures, who mediate so nakedly between social classes. Working people who must be at least minimally genteel in their conduct, waiters mediate class and other social differences, and repeatedly travel between the hot and dirty work of food production and its more-or-less elegant consumption. They help meet deep human needs – for food, drink, shelter, comfort – and do so for money. They serve anyone who can afford to pay and make sure that those who cannot pay do not get served. They are the gatekeepers and executives of modern hospitality, and they populate, enable, and enrich much of Dickens's work.

In this chapter, I would like to explore what it means to wait, and what it means to be waited on, in Dickens's writing. Waiting is rarely a matter just of service, a one-way street of simple distribution. For both customer and waiter have to wait, in their different, socially distinct, ways. They wait, both for each other (the customer to arrive, the waiter to take the order) and, then again, for whatever it is that each wants from the other: food, drink, money. This is not an equal exchange or one without hierarchy, by any means, but it is not simply a matter of domination either. Relations with waiters are often complex or conflicted in Dickens's work, compactly alive with social nuance. One of the most brilliant chapters of G. K. Chesterton's *Charles Dickens* is entitled 'On

the alleged optimism of Dickens', which defends Dickens's 'vulgar optimism' (263) through distinguishing between good and bad kinds of it. The bad kind occurs, for Chesterton, when Dickens's

> kindness to his characters is a careless and insolent kindness. He loses his real charity and adopts the charity of the Charity Organisation Society; the charity that is not kind, the charity that is puffed up, and that does behave itself unseemly. At the end of some of his stories he deals out his characters a kind of out-door relief. (266)

But there is a good kind of optimism in Dickens's work, writes Chesterton, and his defining example of it has a waiter at its heart. Dickens, he writes,

> knew well that the greatest happiness that has been known since Eden is the happiness of the unhappy. … Nothing that has ever been written about human delights, no Earthly Paradise, no Utopia has ever come so near the quick nerve of happiness as his descriptions of the rare extravagances of the poor; such an admirable description, for instance, as that of Kit Nubbles taking his family to the theatre. For he seizes on the real source of the whole pleasure; a holy fear. Kit tells the waiter to bring the beer. And the waiter, instead of saying, 'Did you address that language to me,' said, 'Pot of beer, sir; yes, sir.' That internal and quivering humility of Kit is the only way to enjoy life or banquets; and the fear of the waiter is the beginning of dining. (265–6)

Chesterton exemplifies and justifies Dickens's optimism by evoking a single representative scene from *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In it a poor family, consisting of Kit or Christopher Nubbles, his mother, and future wife, Barbara, find the 'quick nerve of happiness' in a feast of three dozen oysters and a pot of beer. What makes it so special and so important for Chesterton (and Kit) is that the order has been promptly brought to their table by a 'fierce gentleman with whiskers, who … called him, him Christopher Nubbles, "sir"' (301). The waiter here represents for Chesterton a democratic deference, a sudden liberation for Kit and his family from their hard, working lives, a sudden surprising freedom from service, labour and fear.

Waiters are not always so prompt and helpful, though, and characters who share some of Kit's 'intense and quivering humility' not always so readily assuaged. Waiters often trouble the class vulnerabilities of those they wait on, and the 'fear of the waiter' seems almost omnipresent in Dickens's sympathetic characters. In *Great Expectations*, for example, shortly after Pip has moved to London and is living with Herbert Pocket, the two young men send out for 'a nice little dinner' to celebrate. It was, writes Pip, 'a very Lord Mayor's Feast', a 'delightful' event and a 'pleasure … without alloy', but only, he adds, 'when the waiter was not there to watch me' (177).

The watching waiter is a repeated motif in Dickens's work. It is sometimes a disturbing or discomfiting gaze, as it was for Pip, but it can also be more distanced and enigmatic, as in *A Tale of Two Cities*:

> Rounding his mouth and both his eyes, as he stepped backward from the table, the waiter shifted his napkin from his right arm to his left, dropped into a comfortable attitude, and stood surveying the guest while he ate and drank, as from an observatory or watchtower. According to the immemorial usage of waiters in all ages. (21)

There is a precision of social notation here, in Dickens's exact attention to the waiter's mouth, eyes, step, napkin, attitude, and gaze. The waiter seems to look from an imaginary observatory or watchtower, which resembles in some ways that of the panopticon which Michel Foucault deploys in *Discipline and Punish* as a privileged figure of modern disciplinary power (195–228). This waiter's gaze on Jarvis Lorry is not a panoptic one, though, for the viewer in this imaginary observatory or watchtower is a visible, particular individual, who is clearly subordinate and obedient. But such scenes of observation can, as with Pip's and Herbert's feast, evoke a similar disciplinary or subjectifying effect. It is, though, the relationship to *time* that is most striking about the waiter of *A Tale of Two Cities*. In the midst of an historical novel about the French Revolution, we are asked, in reading about the most disturbed and violent period of modern history, to notice such a tiny thing as the particular way a waiter looks, or fails to look, at his client. It is explicitly presented as essentially indifferent to time, a non-historical event: the waiter's gaze is an 'immemorial usage' that has existed 'in all ages'. It seems to exist outside history altogether, a moment of temporal arrest and strange calm in the bloody and busy events of the novel, for the waiter, for Lorry, and for the reader too.

A more complex, double or triple, play of gazes can be seen in the waiters who watch David Copperfield, who, as a child labourer at Murdstone and Grimby's bottle warehouse, went to eat one day 'carrying my own bread … wrapped in a piece of paper, like a book' to 'a famous alamode beef-house near Drury Lane':

> What the waiter thought of such a strange little apparition coming in all alone, I don't know; but I can see him now, staring at me as I ate my dinner, and bringing up the other waiter to look. I gave him a halfpenny for himself, and I wish he hadn't taken it. (130)

A poor worker stares at an even poorer child worker (who is an 'apparition', not quite a phantom, not quite a person) and brings a third to look too. And all three, eating and staring respectively, are still being seen 'now' by the older narrating David, to whom the waiter's thoughts are profoundly enigmatic. In this world of small gestures, the final tiny gift of the halfpenny tip remains an uncertain one. Is it a matter of embarrassment or shame and, if so, why?

Dickens wrote 'wish' not 'wished', so the regret at the halfpenny must be David's thought as he narrates the story. It is not that he *then* wished the waiter had not taken it (because he, the child, needed the money, for example) but *now*, as an adult, wishes he had not. Does he now think it was humiliating for the waiter to be tipped by a child? By such a poor child? Or that it was such a small amount that he must have been very poor to take it? Or that the system of deference such a tip represents is simply shaming all round?

But waiters do much more than gaze, both in life and in Dickens's work. Socially and narratively confined, stuck almost invariably within a single episode in each novel, they often show a gift for maximising their impact, making the slightest gesture memorable or important, brilliant minimalists to a man (and, occasionally, woman). Like Dickens himself, they can do a great deal with very little: a cough, a look, a murmur. When Pumblechook, for example, denounces Pip's ingratitude in front of the landlord and waiter towards the end of *Great Expectations*, the observing waiter is essential to both the suffering and comedy of the scene:

> 'And yet,' said Pumblechook, turning to the landlord and waiter, and pointing me out at arm's length, 'this is him as I ever sported with in his days of happy infancy! Tell me not it cannot be; I tell you this is him!'
>
> A low murmur from the two replied. The waiter appeared to be particularly affected.
>
> 'This is him,' said Pumblechook, 'as I have rode in my shay-cart. This is him as I have seen brought up by hand. This is him untoe the sister of which I was uncle by marriage, as her name was Georgiana M'ria from her own mother, let him deny it if he can!'
>
> The waiter seemed convinced that I could not deny it, and that it gave the case a black look.
>
> 'Young man,' said Pumblechook, screwing his head at me in the old fashion, 'you air a going to Joseph. What does it matter to me, you ask me, where you air a going? I say to you, Sir, you air a going to Joseph.'
>
> The waiter coughed, as if he modestly invited me to get over that. (469–70)

There are three brilliantly realised deadpan reaction shots here, three-quarters of a century both before 'dead-pan' enters the language (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and since Alfred Hitchcock first used the term 'reaction shot' (Davy 9). They can thus be added to the repertoire of proto-filmic effects that Sergei Eisenstein showed in Dickens's work (195–255). But language does things here that film cannot, capturing both the emptiness of Pumblechook's rhetoric ('this is him … this is him … This is him … This is him … This is him …') and the corresponding power of the waiter's silences. It also allows the scene to be focalised through Pip, as the description of each little reaction achieves more and more with less: 'the waiter … appeared to be … seemed convinced … as if':

four syllables diminish to three and then two, the writing as tactful, unassertive and exquisitely painful as the waiter's cough.

Waiters are not always so quiet, though, and there is often activity and aggression too, as we see in one of Dickens's funniest scenes, the meeting of David and 'the friendly waiter' in *David Copperfield*. It tells a tale, if we want to moralise it, of adult ruthlessness and selfishness towards a small child. This is a waiter at the maximum, not silent, deferential, or gazing, but actively, wittily and creatively asserting himself at a child's expense, by inventing more and more ways to eat as much of his food, take as much of his money, and frighten him, all in as polite, cheerful and friendly a manner as possible. The usual relations of power are inverted, and the customer – here the eight-year-old David – is at his most vulnerable. The waiter – 'a twinkling-eyed, pimple-faced man, with his hair standing upright all over his head' (53) – dominates the scene, constantly inventing new ways to fleece, frighten or shame the little boy.

> 'There's half a pint of ale for you. Will you have it now?'
>
> I thanked him, and said, 'Yes.' Upon which he poured it out of a jug into a large tumbler, and held it up against the light, and made it look beautiful.
>
> 'My eye!' he said. 'It seems a good deal, don't it?'
>
> 'It does seem a good deal,' I answered with a smile. For it was quite delightful to me, to find him so pleasant …
>
> 'There was a gentleman here, yesterday,' he said – 'a stout gentleman, by the name of Topsawyer – perhaps you know him?'
>
> 'No,' I said, 'I don't think – '
>
> 'In breeches and gaiters, broad-brimmed hat, grey coat, speckled choaker,' said the waiter.
>
> 'No,' I said bashfully, 'I haven't the pleasure – '
>
> 'He came in here,' said the waiter, looking at the light through the tumbler, 'ordered a glass of this ale – *would* order it – I told him not – drank it, and fell dead. It was too old for him. It oughtn't to be drawn; that's the fact.'
>
> I was very much shocked to hear of this melancholy accident, and said I thought I had better have some water. (53)

The waiter, like Dickens himself, is both a born actor, who can make the ale 'look beautiful' against the light, and a born novelist in the precision of his detail and the vividness of his storytelling. He successively strips little David of his food and drink, charges him threepence to write a letter, tells him that at the school to which he is heading a boy of exactly the same age had his ribs broken, and then takes a shilling for a tip (54–5).

Dickens's two characters here come from groups of people – little boys, waiters – that most novelists rarely bother with, except as props or background to some more interesting adult action. It is a little masterpiece of storytelling with

everything recorded through the polite and innocent David's eyes, who still at the end thinks of the waiter as his 'friend'. David has just left his family forever (his mother and brother will be dead in a few chapters) and will shortly have to rely solely on his friends, so the words 'friend' and 'friendly' here carry a heavy charge. The waiter in many ways anticipates Steerforth, whom David is about to meet, and who will come to dominate him and, through his seduction of Emily, the plot of the book. Like the waiter, Steerforth professes friendship and then takes a good deal of David's money to provide food and drink, very little of which David himself gets to enjoy. With both characters – the waiter, Steerforth – we learn about the pains, pleasures, and uncertainties of what a 'friend' might be. They both form part of a story that is about a child's acts of trust, needs, and vulnerabilities, their scenes about the fulfilments and frustrations of adult appetite and desire, and the losses, shames, and bewilderments that go with them both.

But what do we learn of the waiter's point of view? Immediately before their encounter, David has been beaten by Murdstone 'as if he would have beaten me to death' (46) and sent away from his family home in disgrace. The school he goes to will be violent and abusive; his mother will die a little later. The waiter knows none of this. What does he see? A timid, even traumatised, child? A prosperous little bourgeois? We are not told. There is no sign of resentment on either side here, just a cheery fleecing, a joyful self-assertion, and witty self-dramatisation:

> 'If I hadn't a family, and that family hadn't the cowpock,' said the waiter, 'I wouldn't take a sixpence. If I didn't support a aged pairint, and a lovely sister,' – here the waiter was greatly agitated – 'I wouldn't take a farthing. If I had a good place, and was treated well here, I should beg acceptance of a trifle, instead of taking of it. But I live on broken wittles – and I sleep on the coals' – here the waiter burst into tears. (55)

We are not asked to decide, and have no way of knowing, how much, if any, of what the friendly waiter says about his life is true, how much or how little hardship lies behind this exuberant performance of misery that so successfully arouses the child's compassion.

Waiting time

This chapter is not intended, though, to be merely a set of examples of how revealing waiters, as workers and as people, can be in Dickens's writing, however socially and fictionally marginal they might at first seem. Instead, I want to suggest that the kinds of social and temporal relationships we see in scenes of waiting have a wider resonance for us as readers and critics of Dickens. For thinking about literature is also a matter of waiting. We are waiting *on* and

waiting *for* Dickens, attending on him, perhaps hoping that, if we take enough care, he will arrive at last. For reading and criticism are forms of waiting and, like waiters' work, they are distinctive and strange activities, ubiquitous but also marginal in the modern world. Waiting and reading are both deeply constrained by social expectations but also carry potential transformations and latent revelations. They are encounters where relations of social power are played out, appetites and needs are met or frustrated, and pleasure given or withheld. Scenes of reading and of waiting are events or encounters that have the potential to be quite trivial on the one hand and surprising, defining or memorable on the other. Both also have an intimate and peculiar relation to time, one necessarily of expectation and delay. They are simultaneously intimate and impersonal, and often have questions of knowledge and secrecy at play within them. There is often a good deal of predictability – there's a text or a menu, the dishes have appeared before, there are always other readers – and yet no encounter is the same, each one singular, if not unique. Both waiting and being waited on, like reading and writing, are traversed by relations of power, often unpredictable, sometimes suddenly reversible. We wait on Dickens; he waits on us. Sometimes we get what we want, sometimes not, and sometimes in time, sometimes not.

Waiting is one of the apparently small things in life (small to the rich and powerful, but a job, calling, or way of life to those who have to do it) that carries with it the potential for much greater things. Waiting is, of course, one of the great themes of human thought, as in waiting for Godot, or God, or Lefty. It is essential to much religious thinking, particularly that of a messianic cast, and an important topic in a writer such as Kafka and philosophers such as Heidegger and Derrida. For Heidegger, waiting has a high ethical, ontological and epistemological privilege: 'We are,' states the Teacher in 'Conversation on a Country Path', 'to do nothing but wait' (62). Waiters of the sort that Dickens wrote about bring such elevated concerns down to earth, but the great issues are rarely left totally behind: his waiters deal with appetite, desire, and need, with frustration and satisfaction, and they do so in time and with limited resources, through both managing and living with anticipation, expectation, anxiety, and fulfilment.

Waiters and scenes of waiting have, of course, great comic potential. Waiting is a very confined social role – bound tightly in both time and space, heavily constrained by the conventions of the job and the urgencies of getting food and drink to someone's mouth in a hurry. Two strangers meet, both often in a rush, in a situation where many things can go wrong. Both have to perform a role of a certain gentility, always a difficult thing to manage, particularly when one is stressed. Differences of class, gender, and age can all complicate things. The stakes in such meetings or exchanges seem simultaneously high (one's social status and identity seek confirmation and do not always find it) and low (it is just a meal or a drink). Waiting happens in spaces that are both public and private, and create relationships that are both intimate and distant, both personal

and impersonal. They mix leisure, moments when nothing much happens, with urgency, when someone arrives hungry and in a hurry, or a coach pulls in, or a train is about to depart. As those examples suggest, waiting has a symbiotic relationship with travel. As people travelled more and more in the 19th century, they required more and more people to wait for them in inns, taverns, coffee rooms, and hotels. And, like travel, waiting was something spread widely in the modern world, and by the transport revolutions of industrial capitalism.

Dickens's first book, *Sketches by Boz*, has a good number of waiters, often rather vulnerable or threatened figures, who struggle to control the unruly sociability of pre-Victorian England. 'The Streets – Night' characteristically witness a 'slight altercation when the form of paying the damage is proposed to be gone through by the waiter' (60). Uncle Bill in 'London Recreations' makes a 'splendid joke' by asking a waiter at a tea room for 'tea for four: bread and butter for forty' and then causes a 'loud explosion of mirth' by sticking 'a paper "pig-tail" on the waiter's collar' (98). In *Pickwick Papers*, it is Sam Weller – a 'boots', not a waiter – who has the kind of flourishing narrative centrality and witty life that the book's waiters conspicuously lack, their role often mainly to remind their customers and the reader of the cost of hospitality: as Alfred Jingle says to Pickwick, to warn him off a neighbouring inn: 'Wright's next house, dear – very dear – half-a-crown in the bill, if you look at the waiter – ' (13).

Although they play a part in economic exchanges, enable travel across distances, and are vital to social reproduction, waiters are, for the most part, ignored or marginalised in more conventional and orthodoxly class-bound novels than those of Dickens. They are usually pushed to the margins of the lives of those they serve, and into functional and simple supporting roles in their plots. They have little if any power. They may be sometimes registered as hostile or incompetent, but their narrative space is almost unremittingly confined. They are passed by in many important novels, and restricted to a single brief mention, for example, in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. An exception is Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, which has a number of powerful vignettes of conflicts with waiters, little battles of civility between the single, independent woman Lucy Snowe and the waiters she is forced to rely on in her travels:

> Maintaining a very quiet manner towards this arrogant little maid, and subsequently observing the same towards the parsonic-looking, black-coated, white-neckclothed waiter, I got civility from them ere long. I believe at first they thought I was a servant; but in a little while they changed their minds, and hovered in a doubtful state between patronage and politeness. (56)

Lucy achieves this transformation in her treatment through the waiter's memory of her late father, whose status as a clergyman secures her gentility, so that after a 10-minute conversation,

> A ready and obliging courtesy now replaced his former uncomfortably doubtful manner; henceforth I need no longer be at a loss for a civil answer to a sensible question. (58–9)

Lucy here secures a victory through assertion of her class status, through the naming of her father, that causes the restoration of a 'civil' and 'sensible' moral economy and class exchange, a world of reciprocal respect, grounded in a fundamental, mutually recognised, class difference and hierarchy.

In Dickens's work, class relations are rarely so secure and there is thus a much more dynamic and doubtful set of interchanges between waiters and their clients. Whereas Lucy can marvel at 'the sagacity evinced by waiters and chambermaids in proportioning the accommodation to the guest' and wonder at how they can 'tell at a glance that I, for instance, was an individual of no social significance, and little burdened by cash?' (72), in Dickens's work things are less certain, social performance less transparent. Dickens is fascinated by the gaps, disjunctions, failures, and discrepancies between what is intended or desired and what may happen. Pip, for example, goes to bed after his feast with Herbert to find that the waiter had at some point shoved 'the boiled fowl into my bed in the next room' so that 'I found much of its parsley and butter in a state of congelation when I retired for the night' (177). Performers themselves, waiters also make those that they serve acutely aware of the nature, failures, and vulnerability of social performance in general. This often entails a delicate social notation as when Pip and Estella wait for the coach to Richmond:

> I requested a waiter … to show us a private sitting-room. Upon that, he pulled out a napkin, as if it were a magic clue without which he couldn't find the way upstairs, and led us to the black hole of the establishment: fitted up with a diminishing mirror (quite a superfluous article, considering the hole's proportions), an anchovy sauce-cruet, and somebody's pattens. (262)

Not quite comic, not quite magical, the waiter's suggestive, superfluous gesture is as enigmatic as those of Miss Havisham. He is like a diminishing mirror to Pip's and Estella's failed romance, the magic clue of his napkin able to lead them only to a small 'black hole' with a few sparse, useless objects and a mirror that makes it seem yet smaller still.

In Dickens's work it is almost invariably a male waiter, not a waitress. Indeed, there are only two occasions when the word 'waitress' is used in all his *oeuvre*: a passing reference to the waitress in a public house in Portugal Street in *Pickwick Papers* (693) and then Polly, a 'bouncing young female of forty', in the 'Slap-bang' (246) eating house favoured by Mr Smallweed and his friends in *Bleak House*:

> Mr. Smallweed, compelling the attendance of the waitress with one hitch of his eyelash, instantly replies as follows: 'Four veals and hams is three, and four potatoes is three and four, and one summer cabbage is three and six, and three marrows is four and six, and six breads is five, and three Cheshires is five and three, and four pints of half-and-half is six and three, and four small rums is eight and three, and three Pollys is eight and six. Eight and six in half a sovereign, Polly, and eighteenpence out!' (253)

In this remarkable social document and performance, which is also both an arithmetic and rhythmic triumph, we learn a lot about the price of marrows, bread, beer, rum, veal, ham, and potatoes in the mid-19th century. We learn about the tip too – of threepence on a bill of 8s 3d (almost exactly 3%). In Smallweed's characteristically instrumental and exploitative idiom, Polly here becomes a thing like a potato or a marrow, and if 'three Pollys' is threepence she is the same value as a portion of cheese, potato, or bread; when all three are put together she is worth more than a portion of cabbage and slightly less than one of marrow.

Perhaps the most compactly memorable waiter in all of Dickens's work appears early on in *Little Dorrit* after Arthur Clennam has returned to England for the first time in two decades. Clennam, about to visit his feared 'mother', finds himself on a melancholy day in a hotel nearby.

> 'Beg pardon, sir,' said a brisk waiter, rubbing the table. 'Wish see bed-room?'
>
> 'Yes. I have just made up my mind to do it.'
>
> 'Chaymaid!' cried the waiter. 'Gelen box num seven wish see room!'
>
> 'Stay!' said Clennam, rousing himself. 'I was not thinking of what I said; I answered mechanically. I am not going to sleep here. I am going home.'
>
> 'Deed, sir? Chaymaid! Gelen box num seven, not go sleep here, gome.' (42)

The waiter is 'brisk' and that briskness also includes his language, which is accelerated and abbreviated, with syllables and pronouns lost, and words compacted and fused together. 'Going home' contracts to the bleakly functional 'gome', and in 'Gelen' politeness is ungently crushed. We have here a nameless 'Chaymaid', a nameless waiter, Clennam a box number, with the room a mere 'room' and no more: a triply anonymous exchange. The speech of Dickens's working-class characters often has a deep semantic richness and suggestiveness, as when Sam Weller speaks of 'have-his-carcase' (510) for 'habeas corpus' or 'allybi' (408; Bowen, *Other Dickens* 65–8) for alibi. Here there is no such polysemy. 'Gelen' and 'Chaymaid' remain simple contractions; only 'num' for 'number' numbly suggests a numbness to this enumerated man. 'I answered

mechanically,' writes Clennam, as the machinic inhabits and empties out all speech and thought here, an automatism and diminishing repetition ('not go sleep here'), not so very far from the kind of embodied death wish that we will shortly see in the Clennam household itself.

Christopher the waiter

So far the waiters that I have discussed have had relatively small roles, and show Dickens's brilliance in the creation of minor characters who, as Alex Woloch has shown, characteristically are both contained by and burst free of their narrative subordination (125–9). But in one Dickens text, the waiter – Christopher, from the 1862 Christmas number of *All the Year Round*, 'Somebody's Luggage' – is both central character and narrator. Strikingly, there had been no waiter in the first of Dickens's co-authored Christmas specials to feature an inn – The Holly Tree Inn, around which the 1854 *Household Words* Christmas number was built – despite the fact that there were chapters from the points of view of 'The Guest', 'The Ostler', 'The Boots', 'The Landlord', and 'The Barmaid', and Dickens in his original planning letter suggested one chapter might be called 'The Waiter' (*Letters* 7:714). But he made up for it with 'Somebody's Luggage', the single splendid occasion when a waiter both has narrative control and speaks at length in all of Dickens's *oeuvre*. Chesterton is one of the few critics to have noticed the story, but he calls it 'some of the best work that Dickens ever did' (Chesterton, *Criticisms* 141):

> Dickens obviously knew enough about that waiter to have made him a running spring of joy throughout a whole novel; as the beadle is in *Oliver Twist*, or the undertaker in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Every touch of him tingles with truth, from the vague gallantry with which he asks, 'Would'st thou know, fair reader (if of the adorable female sex)' to the official severity with which he takes the chambermaid down, 'as many pegs as is desirable for the future comfort of all parties'. (143–4)

The story was written at a troubled time in Dickens's life, and it repeatedly and complexly plays with ideas and tropes of authorship, secrecy, and identity. He was delighted with its underlying idea, as can be seen in a letter he wrote to his closest friend, John Forster:

> I have been at work with such a will, that I have done the opening and conclusion of the Christmas number. They are done in the character of a waiter, and I think are exceedingly droll. The thread on which the stories are to hang, is spun by this waiter, and is, purposely, very slight; but has, I fancy, a ridiculously comical and unexpected end. The waiter's

> account of himself includes (I hope) everything you know about waiters, presented humorously. (*Letters* 10:126)

The underlying idea – refined and complicated in the telling – is that Christopher is persuaded to buy some pieces of luggage that had been left under the bed of the hotel at which he works. He sells the clothes, the umbrella, and other things, but then is left with a number of manuscripts. They turn out to be stories written and then abandoned by an unsuccessful author; the whole number is concerned with the question of their value, both economic and aesthetic. Christopher successfully arranges to have them published by 'AYR', *All the Year Round*, the magazine that Dickens edited and which, of course, did in fact first publish them. Its readers would thus read a story about a fictionalised process of writing, abandonment, discovery, submission, proof-reading, editing and publication of the very stories that they were reading.

The stories of 'Somebody's Luggage' were, of course, written in part by Dickens and, as was usual with the Christmas numbers, partly by other authors, his fellow-contributors. Dickens divides and distributes himself complexly in this work, playing hide-and-seek with himself, his characters, and his readers. Not only the author of some stories, coordinator of all, and creator both of their fictional author and fictional coordinator, he also appears as a famous editor in Christopher's account. Dickens self-deprecatingly removes or cuts down praise of himself – three footnotes each read 'The remainder of this complimentary parenthesis editorially struck out' (500) – but his power is undoubted; the story ends with Dickens-as-editor throwing the author's messily corrected proofs on the fire. There are multiple self-divisions, self-aggrandisements, self-destructions, and self-deprecations at work here, as Dickens fictionally disperses himself in many roles, frames and stories, fictionally deleting himself, fictionally setting fire to his own writing.

'Somebody's Luggage' is not only served up by a waiter; it is also a story about waiting: the stories themselves have to wait, abandoned, for six years before their discovery; the unnamed author repeatedly waits in vain for replies from booksellers and publishers; the inn and Christopher wait for the owner of the luggage to return and it seems almost until the end that he never will. Dickens's contributions (the two frames narrated by Christopher and the stories called 'His Boots' and 'His Brown Paper Parcel') are full of secrets and family secrets in particular, with many hidden, lost, and divided identities (Bowen, 'Bebelle'). They tell stories about neglected or abandoned children, about fictions that fail to appear in print, and destructive rivalries in art. It is all done with characteristic lightness, and without the heavy breathing that literary modernism might have brought to such metafictional play. But together they form a remarkable self-conscious foregrounding of questions of fiction, narration, and value, by Dickens, by Christopher, and by the unnamed author. And at its heart is a waiter, without whom none of these lost manuscripts, identities, self-divisions, secrets, and revelations would appear.

Dickens's first inset contribution, 'His Boots', is one of his more riddlingly enigmatic tales. It tells a story about a secret baby, and seems to have a strong autobiographical impulse behind it. Christopher was also a secret baby whose mother, as a waitress, could never admit to his existence. He was in consequence 'conveyed, by surreptitious means, into a pantry adjoining the Admiral Nelson, Civic and General Dining-Rooms' to be fed. It is a family story, and one that begins with the conflicts between familial obligations and professional waiting duties for both his parents. For his waiter father, 'all that part of his existence which was unconnected with open Waitering was kept a close secret, and was acknowledged by your mother to be a close secret' (453). Addressing himself, Christopher remembers how 'you and your mother flitted about the court, close secrets both of you, and would scarcely have confessed under torture that you knew your father, or that your father had … kith or kin or chick or child' (453). This is what it means to be 'bred to … born to' waitering (451). His parents cannot acknowledge him and so he is forced to 'receive by stealth' his mother's milk ('that healthful sustenance which is the pride and boast of the British female constitution') (451), repeatedly interrupted by his mother's waitressing work and saturated by the objects, shouts, smells, and stiflings of a waiting life. Addressing his infant self, Christopher tells him:

> Under the combined influence of the smells of roast and boiled, and soup, and gas, and malt liquors, you partook of your earliest nourishment; your unwilling grandmother sitting prepared to catch you when your mother was called and dropped you; your grandmother's shawl ever ready to stifle your natural complainings; your innocent mind surrounded by uncongenial cruets, dirty plates, dish-covers, and cold gravy; your mother calling down the pipe for veals and porks, instead of soothing you with nursery rhymes. Under these untoward circumstances you were early weaned. (453)

Waiters' lives are full of other people's feeding, and this starts early for Christopher, who tells us how his breastfeeding was repeatedly interrupted and ended early by the demands of adults wanting to be fed. It is a kind of backstage scene, for 'a Waitress known to be married would ruin the best of businesses – it is the same as on the stage' (453), and a comic, sad story about stifling, complaining, interrupted breastfeeding, early enforced weaning, dirt, cold, untoward circumstances, and no nursery rhymes. His father, we learn, was an alcoholic, someone who cannot stop drinking.

The actual author of the stories, by contrast, is not much more than a cipher. He appears first in the form of the abandoned luggage and a bill mainly for alcohol, ink, paper, and messages to publishers: a kind of minimal literary archive. Separated too soon from the breast himself, Christopher carries out a kind of weaning of these writings, or brings them to parturition, for money. But publication is attended throughout by guilt. Once he has sold the manuscripts,

'[t]he elasticity of my spirits departed. Fruitless was the bottle, whether wine or medicine. I had recourse to both, and the effect of both upon my system was witheringly lowering' (493). In fact, it turns out to be a story, as quite often in Dickens, about unnecessary guilt, for the author is in fact delighted by Christopher's success in placing or serving up his work. But the writer remains the same defeated figure who abandoned his manuscripts, still drinking, still seeking to publish his work, and still failing.

Waiting then becomes a remarkable suggestive trope in 'Somebody's Luggage', the figure of the necessary intermediary, delay, enigma, weaning, cost, secrecy, silence, and suffering that lies between literary creation and the possibility of its publication and consumption. The ending in one way is a happy one, in which the author's manuscripts, after his abandonment of them and repeated failures and delays, are finally brought into print through the partnership of Dickens and a waiter. But we do not forget the price that is paid: Christopher is a great Dickens survivor, like Magwitch and Oliver Twist, but seems to have no erotic or personal life away from his work, for all his jaunty energy. When the author praises him as 'an instrument in the hands of Destiny', Christopher shakes his head in a 'melancholy' way and replies, 'Perhaps we all are' (499). When he asks if Christopher ever has a holiday from waitering (so that he can read him his unpublished works), he replies, 'Never! Not from the cradle to the grave' (499). He can never wean himself away from waiting, and the story ends in flames, with the author's heavily corrected and smudged proofs thrown by a laughing Dickens into the fire.

There is one bravura final waiting performance, or rather two performances, in Dickens's work, from his last, unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. For Chesterton, Dickens 'never did anything better' (Chesterton, *Criticisms* 220). It is another scene, like that with Pip and Herbert Pocket, in which waiters bring food into the home, here to that of the lawyer Mr Grewgious, who is attended by his clerk, Bazzard, 'accompanied by two waiters—an immoveable waiter, and a flying waiter' (91). The flying waiter brings all the food, and lays the cloth 'with amazing rapidity and dexterity'; the immovable waiter, 'who had brought nothing, found fault with him' (91). In turn, the flying waiter polishes glasses, and fetches the soup, made dish, joint, and poultry, but however hard he works 'he was always reproached on his return by the immovable waiter' (91). The meal continues until at the end:

> by which time the flying waiter was severely blown, the immovable waiter gathered up the tablecloth under his arm with a grand air, and … directed a valedictory glance towards Mr. Grewgious, conveying: 'Let it be clearly understood between us that the reward is mine, and that Nil is the claim of this slave,' and pushed the flying waiter before him out of the room.
>
> It was like a highly-finished miniature painting representing My Lords of the Circumlocution Department, Commandership-in-Chief of

> any sort, Government. It was quite an edifying little picture to be hung on the line in the National Gallery. (91)

As in 'Somebody's Luggage', we have a waiterly moment of self-reference by Dickens but it is here not an allegory of authorship but of bureaucracy and politics. Dickens redeploys and revises the Circumlocution Office of *Little Dorrit*, not as the overarching and obstructive narrative presence of that novel but in second-order form. As Helen Small puts it, Dickens is 'framing his own signature prose as a national exhibit or museum piece' (263).

But Dickens does more than frame here; he also revises. The vignette of waiters transforms the Circumlocution Office from an extendedly drawn, socially embedded, aristocratic-dominated form of bureaucratic obstruction into a single brief episode, a compact painterly allegory of an essential division of labour, between those who do the work and those who do none. The latter group claim all the credit and find fault. The allegorising of the passage from *Drood* does not allow these to be individualised, particular waiters like Christopher or David Copperfield's friend, but instead insists on their radically typical nature. They are a double act, a comic or satiric 'turn', standing out in the novel not through their suggestive individuality but through their socially and political representative force, as a pair. They stand not for the division of workers and managers exactly, nor workers and aristocrats, nor the poor and the rich, nor even labour and capital. Instead, Dickens miniatures and pictorialises his own work, to simultaneously reinforce and extend both the pessimism and radicalism of its social critique: the satiric target succinctly and effortlessly expands from 'My Lords of the Circumlocution Department' through 'Commandership-in-Chief of any sort' to the final, brutally dismissive, 'Government'.

After the famous passage with the waiter in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre wonders about the reality of time. 'If time is real,' he writes, 'even God will have to "wait for the sugar to dissolve"'(156). Somewhere between God and the waiter are readers of literature, whose times are always disconcerted, always uncertain, always a little forward or a little behind, too attentive or not attentive enough, always waiting for the sugar to dissolve. We might thus be, I want to suggest, not 'after Dickens' exactly, but waiting on and for Dickens, alternately and alternatively friendly, flying, immoveable, parsonical, bouncing, mechanical, neutralised, and tearful, like an automaton or a person who looks down from an observatory or watchtower, badly weaned.

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We have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant…

G.K. CHESTERTON, *CHARLES DICKENS*

THE 20th and 21st centuries have continued the quest, so aptly described by G.K. Chesterton in 1906, to 'find' Charles Dickens and recapture the characteristically Dickensian. From research attempting to classify and categorise the nature of his popularity to a century of film adaptations, Dickens's legacy encompasses an array of conventional and innovative forms.

Dickens After Dickens includes chapters from rising and leading scholars in the field, offering creative and varied discussion of the continued and evolving influence of Dickens and the nature of his legacy across the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. Its chapters show the surprising resonances that Dickens has had and continues to have, arguing that the author's impact can be seen in mainstream cultural phenomena such as HBO's TV series *The Wire* and Donna Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch*, as well as in diverse areas such as Norwegian literature, video games and neo-Victorian fiction. It discusses Dickens as a biographical figure, an intertextual moment, and a medium through which to explore contemporary concerns around gender and representation.

The new research represented in this book brings together a range of methodologies, approaches and sources, offering an accessible and engaging re-evaluation that will be of interest to scholars of Dickens, Victorian fiction, adaptation, and cultural history, and to teachers, students, and general readers interested in the ways in which we continue to read and be influenced by the author's work.

This collection is edited by Dr Emily Bell (Loughborough University) with a Foreword by Professor Juliet John (Royal Holloway, University of London), author of *Dickens and Mass Culture*. Dr Bell is a board member for the Oxford Dickens series and an editor for the Dickens Letters Project. She also acted as the first Communications Committee Chair of the international Dickens Society, and has published on Dickens, life writing and commemoration.

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