Norbert Lennartz / Dieter Koch (eds.)

Texts, Contexts and Intertextuality

Dickens as a Reader

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1. Introduction

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Norbert Lennartz (Vechta)

1.1 Introduction: Dickens as a Voracious Reader

If there was a top ten list of underrated and unrecognised writers (at least from a German perspective), Charles Dickens would be in the top three along with Anthony Trollope and George Meredith. While Meredith, another writer from Portsmouth, has always been credited with being a high-brow author, writing for the splendid few, Dickens is still afflicted with the blot of being a vulgar novelist, who, like his contemporary Trollope, is supposed to have catered to the taste of the masses and, as 'Mr Popular Sentiment,'[1] gratified the crude demands of the growing Victorian literary market. Mr Polly's attitude towards Dickens in H.G. Wells's 1909 novel *The History of Mr Polly* is symptomatic: giving the reader a long list of his protagonist's favourite writers, which range from Rabelais, Boccaccio to Shakespeare and Sterne, Wells only laconically states that Mr Polly did not take kindly to Dickens,[2] notwithstanding the fact that he lives in a Dickensian universe inhabited by people that might be borrowed from Dickens's novels.

While critics unanimously agree that the Victorians took to reading and that even anti-heroes such as Mr Polly immersed themselves in canonical texts from the Renaissance to the 18th century, the image of Dickens as a purveyor of sensational stories and a non-intellectual still persists. Stalwartly ignoring the fact that Dickens possessed an impressive library, which J.H. Stonehouse listed in *The Library of Charles Dickens from Gadshill* as early as in 1935, most of the writers with avantgardist and modernist pretensions seemed to be cementing the notion of Dickens as a cultural Kaspar Hauser. In an autobiographical account by his brother Stanislaus, Joyce, one of the paragons of intertextuality, is reported to have flaunted his indifference to Dickens and to have peremptorily stated that he could not stand the literature of either Scott or Dickens. Given the

1 Dickens is satirised as Mr Popular Sentiment in Trollope's novel *The Warden* (1855). See *The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens. Anniversary Edition*, ed. Paul Schlicke, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011, p. 587.

2 Wells, H.G. (1993), *The History of Mr Polly*, ed. Norman Mackenzie, London: Everyman, p. 102.

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manifold allusions to and quotations by Dickens in *Ulysses* (1922), in particular in 'Oxen in the Sun,' we must assume that Joyce's attitude towards Dickens was much more complex and characterised by what Harold Bloom called an anxiety of influence.[3] Trying to immunise himself against the negative aspects of influence, to the "*influenza* in the realm of literature,"[4] Joyce seems to be keen on severing the bonds with the Victorian age and its paragons of culture, but cannot help admitting that he is, like all other modernists, "caught up in a dialectical relationship,"[5] in a love-hatred relationship with Dickens. The simple fact that, in the year of Joyce's publication of *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot dallied with the idea of giving his poem *The Waste Land* (1922) a title based on a quotation from a Dickens novel – 'He Do the Police in Different Voices' from *Our Mutual Friend* – makes us clearly aware of the fact that – despite their ostentatious disregard for Dickens – the modernists sensed that the argument of Dickens's shallowness was becoming untenable. What they could no longer deny was that there was a submerged plurality of voices, positions and opinions in Dickens's novels, a budding cultural multiperspectivism which not only exceeded the narrow boundaries of Victorian aesthetics, but also revealed the vast knowledge that Dickens must have gained from reading heaps of books and articles.

When poets such as T.S. Eliot attached annotations to their highly convoluted poems they made it patently clear that they, unlike the Romantics, were readers who absorbed huge quantities of literature and that they, unlike their predecessors, defined poetry and fiction as webs of intertextual references, as jigsaw puzzle elements making up the wider context of time-honoured tradition.[6] Their literary works were not only slowly absorbed into the canon of world literature, they were also deeply soaked in the tradition and bristled with clear or oblique references to their predecessors. Before this backdrop, Dickens was considered neither a substantial contributor to the order of the canon nor a reader who processed books and created a repository of time-spanning knowledge. When A.O.J. Cockshut maintains that "Dickens was seldom greatly influenced by other writers; he was at once too original and too egotistical to be a very attentive reader,"[7] he subscribes to the image of Dickens as a dilettante who, despite his originality, invents his stories without intellectual foundation and without tapping the pools of knowledge, which even in the 1960s were supposed to be exclusively reserved for the splendid few.

3 See Bloom, Harold (1973), *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*, New York: Oxford UP.
4 Ibid., p. 38. Italics in the original.
5 Ibid., p. 91.
6 Eliot, T.S. (1964), 'Tradition and Individual Talent' *Selected Essays,* London: Faber & Faber, pp. 3 – 11.
7 Quoted in Gager, Valerie L. (1996), *Shakespeare and Dickens. The Dynamics of Influence*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 1.

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While both writers and critics disseminated the view that Dickens was scarcely up to his times, that, as a member of the bourgeois class, he abstained from revolutionising Victorian literature (a fact which is questionable when one looks deeper into the political and cultural radicalism of most of his novels),[8] and that, as a retailer of literary mass products, he created novels in a Fagin-like abiogenesis, a closer look at the variegated layers of intertextuality in his novels is evidence of the contrary: that Dickens must have been a passionate reader and an avid processer of texts, who, as a member of the British Library since 1830, had had access to a cornucopia of books, "everything from the works of Shakespeare to Arthur Austin's *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*, and Hans Holbein's *Dance of Death*."[9] To what extent Dickens was a pioneer in Victorian novel writing can easily be proved by a close reading of his intricate rhetorics, but what is even more evident is that, by straddling the generic boundaries between fiction, philosophy and natural science, Dickens was a novelist who redefined the genre of the Victorian novel in terms of an encyclopedic and modern curiosity shop, where the *belles lettres* and (pseudo-) sciences were on the same shelves. Seen before this backdrop, the view endorsed by earlier critics and biographers such as John Forster that after the publication of *David Copperfield* in 1850 Dickens's creativity was on the decline,[10] is subject to revision. What Dickens reveals in his later, more darkish novels is that he was able to explore new modes of writing, and that in all of his novels he was eager to draw upon a rich literary and scientific history to make his readers alert to the enormous extent to which his individual talent was embedded in various, mutually inspiring traditions.

In contrast to the mushrooming classes of the *poetae docti* in the wake of Swinburne and Mallarmé, who openly fling a welter of intertextual references into their readers' faces and thus widen the gap between modernist authors and their readership, Dickens prefers to conceal his reading lists and to weave them into his texts less conspicuously. In this context, Harold Bloom's classification of writers into the categories of weak and strong authorship turns out to be as little helpful as the project of the multifarious (neo-) positivist source-hunters who try to lay bare evidence of Dickens's eclecticism and lack of invention.[11] Given the fact that he is a strong writer in the Bloomian sense and that he wrestles with his

8 See here Lennartz, Norbert (forthcoming 2014), 'Radical Dickens. Dickens and the Tradition of Romantic Radicalism' *Dickens as the Agent of Change*, ed. Joachim Frenk and Lena Steveker, New York: AMS P.

9 Douglas-Fairhurst, Robert (2013), *Becoming Dickens. The Invention of a Novelist*, Cambridge/MA: Harvard UP, pp. 66 – 67.

10 Forster, John cited in Mazzeno, Laurence W. (2008), *The Dickens Industry: Critical Perspectives 1836 – 2005*, New York: Camden House, p. 21.

11 Bloom (1973), p. 5.

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strong precursors,[12] Dickens is neither motivated by a craving for *kenosis* nor by the dubitable desire to "save the Egotistical sublime at a father's expense."[13] Shorn of all these Oedipal imputations Dickens's intentions are more pragmatic: by weaving a net of intertextual references, he seeks to make his stories readable and to give his plots unobtrusively some canonical underpinning to save them from the vortex of emergent mass production.

Faced with the enormous dichotomy in the 19th century between trashy melodrama and highbrow culture (later reflected in George Gissing's dark novel *New Grub Street*), Dickens tries to make up for this gap by hoping to reconcile his readers' low literary expectations to ideas that he culled from various areas of literary and visual culture, from (pseudo-) scientific discourses, from philosophy and economic texts. Without falling into the trap of being too elitist and suffering from Meredith's fate of being invisible on the market, Dickens succeeded in co-opting literary authorities for his melodramatic plots that (like the well-cured bacon in *Oliver Twist*)[14] were interlaced with modern and intellectual ideas. One outstanding example of this combination of melodramatic or sensational storylines with fragments of traditional literary texts is the way Dickens deals with Shakespeare in his novels. As a novelist with strong leanings to the theatre and theatrical performance, Dickens is drawn towards Shakespeare, and in particular towards *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, but also to *King Lear* and *Othello.*[15] As Valerie L. Gager writes in her seminal study, Dickens is not only an enthusiast who, even on his trip to America, constantly carries in his great-coat pocket the Shakespeare John Forster bought for him in Liverpool, he also systematically uses quotations from Shakespeare to place him a "line of direct descent from respectable literary tradition, thereby dissociating his novels from such inferior popular genres as the 'Newgate novel.'"[16] What is striking is that theories of descent, so prevalent in 19th-century culture, not only fuel discourses about evolution, but also seem to permeate literature and make writers think about cultural pedigrees they either want to belong to or they repudiate as being degenerate.

Aware of the novel's liminality in the hierarchy of genres, but also highly responsive to man's precarious anthropological position in the pre-Darwinian world, Dickens constructs *David Copperfield* as a *bildungsroman* with an educational programme which is deeply steeped in the classics, and, as mentioned before, in particular in Shakespeare. In the novel that can be seen as a morality play translated into prose, David is blind and impervious to the beneficial in-

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 91.
14 Dickens, Charles (2003), *Oliver Twist*, ed. Philip Horne, London: Penguin, p. 134.
15 See the entry on Shakespeare in *The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens*, pp. 537 – 40.
16 Gager (1996), p. 34 and p. 174.

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fluence of Agnes, his "better angel."[17] Captivated by "a worser spirit,"[18] as the speaker is in Shakespeare's sonnet 144, David is unable to evade the pernicious fascination which radiates not so much from a dark lady as from Jonathan Steerforth, a Byronic hero with traces of the Machiavellian villain, who seems to cast a moderately homoerotic spell over David. To what extent David is exposed to various "sinister love triangle[s]"[19] – as for instance to Uriah, to Agnes and himself – and to variable threatening constellations of figures only becomes retrospectively clear, when the reader is made to ponder on the submerged relevance of Shakespeare's sonnets for Dickens's most autobiographical novel.

Having seduced Little Emily and betrayed his friend's confidence, Steerforth covers up a moment of pensiveness with a slightly altered quotation from *Macbeth:* "Why, being gone, I am a man again" (p. 330). The attentive reader is instantaneously reminded of the banquet scene, where Macbeth has just seen Banquo's apparition and – due to his mental deterioration – subjected Renaissance images of kingship and masculinity to question. Jeremy Tambling is certainly right, when, in his annotations to the novel, he refers to David assuming the role of Banquo's ghost and helping to undermine his façade of Byronic libertinism.[20] What the context of the quotation also shows is that Dickens's notion of anthropology is an open one and hardly in accordance with ideas that Victorians entertained about British man's superiority. As Steerforth via Shakespeare seems to indicate, man is a brittle construction that purports to fight "the rugged Russian bear, / The arm'd rhinoceros, or th'Hyrcan tiger,"[21] but that is constantly threatened by disintegration and the danger of relapsing into bestiality itself. Even David, the admonishing ghost and the protagonist of the story, had come to realise that he himself, the avid reader of 18th-century literature, was not impervious to onsets of animality, when in the company of Steerforth and others he had been drinking too much and jeopardising his position as a rational human being in a *bildungsroman.* In a letter of apology addressed to Agnes, he explicitly quotes Shakespeare who expanded on the perverseness that "a man should put an enemy into his mouth."[22] This quotation is taken from *Othello*, where Cassio let himself be led into temptation by Iago, and by drinking too much alcohol revealed that the demarcation line between

17 Dickens, Charles (2004), *David Copperfield*, ed. Jeremy Tambling, London: Penguin, p. 844.
18 Sonnet 144, l. 4. Shakespeare, William (2006), *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones, London: Thomson Learning, p. 403.
19 Gager (1996), p. 194.
20 Tambling, Jeremy (2004), *David Copperfield*, Annotations, p. 958.
21 Shakespeare, William (2006), *Macbeth* III, 4, 99 – 100. (The Arden Shakespeare), ed. Kenneth Muir, London: Thomson Learning, p. 95.
22 Shakespeare, William (2004), *Othello* II, 3, 285 f. (The Arden Shakespeare), ed. E.A.J. Honigmann, London: Thomson Learning, p. 199.

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humanity and animality could easily be blurred. Cassio's entire speech on the imminent process of degeneration which man is constantly exposed to – "that we should with joy, pleasance, revel and applause, transform ourselves into beasts!"[23] – is implied in Dickens's novel and requires a reader who not only enjoys the odd quotation, but is familiar with its context and knows how to appreciate the pleasure of transferring Shakespearean texts into modern times.[24] Thus, before the backdrop of Shakespeare's tragedies, it is, on the one hand, intriguing to see Steerforth in terms of a variety of roles and disguises, as Iago, Macbeth, Edmund or some other malicious schemer and, and on the other, to ascertain the extent to which man is eager to conceal his dormant bestial nature behind histrionic masks and quotations. When Oscar Wilde's Sibyl Vane in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* removes her Shakespearean masks and refuses to impersonate Juliet, Ophelia or Rosaline, she proves to be only an empty husk for the dandyish spectator; Dickens, by contrast, seems to be insinuating that, behind the palimpsest of various early modern texts, man is not only stark naked, but more often than not an intractable monster, a truth scarcely compatible with the framework of melodrama.

The process of unearthing references to Shakespeare's plays in Dickens's novels is rewarding, but is also liable to turn into speculation. Attempts to place little Paul Dombey "within a direct line of descent from Shakespeare's children" sound as vague and far-fetched as the endeavours to interpret Dombey's attempted suicide in the light of the *Macbeth* motif.[25] When Gager finally has to admit that "unlike Macbeth, Dombey is saved by the sudden apparition of the daughter who has always loved him,"[26] the hope to see a Shakespearean matrix lying underneath most of Dickens's novels has turned into an hermeneutic pitfall and created the distorted image of Dickens as an idolater of Shakespeare, going even so far as to cast David Copperfield as "the introspective, self-doubting Hamlet from the very first sentence."[27]

What this collection of essays intends to show is that Dickens is far from being an emulator or plagiarist. Nor is he in the Bloomian terminology a "weaker talent" that idealises its predecessors.[28] As a gluttonous reader, Dickens is eager to build bridges between the past and the present and to find means to show his novels as intricate parts of a long continuum. While critics such as Gager evoke

23 Ibid., II, 3, 287 f.
24 This use of Shakespeare's *Othello* is different from the burlesque *O'Thello* that Dickens wrote for the stage and which shows that Dickens was able to approach Shakespeare from various angles. See Douglas-Fairhurst, (2013), p. 89.
25 Gager (1996), pp. 219 – 220.
26 Ibid., p. 221.
27 Ibid., p. 241.
28 Bloom (1973), p. 5.

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the impression that Dickens doggedly followed in Shakespeare's footsteps, a closer look at his novels, however, reveals that Dickens aspired to the status of a Goethean *uomo universale*. Apart from his "greedy relish" for travel literature, for British history, medical treatises, philosophical and economic texts, Dickens indefatigably browsed through 18th-century literature, through the picaresque tradition and, last but not least, through the Bible in his almost Faustian pursuit of knowledge, of references and literary foils. Despite the fact that for a growing number of Victorians the Bible had become "a locus of hermeneutical instability,"[29] and although we know that Dickens must have been spared Ruskin's ordeal of being forced by his mother "to learn long chapters of the Bible by heart; as well as to read it every syllable through, aloud, hard names and all, from Genesis to the Apocalypse,"[30] we are left in no doubt that he was familiar with the Bible and knew how to make it profitable for his novels. As each cultural period seems to reduce the entirety of the Bible to a few favourite chapters, it is more than just a simple conjecture that the Victorians were not so much fascinated by the Song of Solomon (as Shakespeare and the 17th century were) as by the Book of Genesis with its stories of the Creation, the loss of Paradise and the Deluge.[31] From a literary perspective, the Bible seems to be for Dickens on a par with Shakespeare; and what is clearly an indication of Dickens's excellence as a writer is that he just does not enumerate quotations from the Bible, as scholars in reference books might want to make us believe, but that he amply uses motifs, allusions and loose biblical contexts. Dickens, thus, integrates elements and fragments from the Old Testament so skilfully and unexpectedly that it takes some close reading of the novels to notice that, after his expulsion from the little garden of Eden with the Cerberus-like dog in the kennel, David Copperfield's life is a voyage aboard various arks – Peggotty's ark on the shore of Yarmouth with an odd assortment of social misfits (including Ham, Noah's son), Betsey Trotwood's house giving shelter to Mr Dick and eventually his own home offering hospitality even to Mephistophelean characters such as Uriah Heep. In *Dombey and Son*, Sol Gills and Captain Cuttle are not only the owners and inhabitants of a little nautical shop, they are also the amiable and quirky crew of an ark that defies both the sharks of modern capitalism, Mr Carker, and gaudy pageantries such as Cleopatra's barge, which, however, in ironic contrast to Shakespeare's depiction of Cleopatra's ship in *Antony and Cleopatra*, is now reduced to a dreary wheelchair.

29 Larson, Janet L. (2008), *Dickens and the Broken Scripture*, Athens: U of Georgia P, p. 3.
30 Ruskin, John (2012), *Praeterita*, ed. Francis O'Gorman, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 7.
31 Lennartz, Norbert (2014), 'Figurative Literalism: the Image of the Creator in 19th-Century British Literature' *The Bible and the Arts*, ed. Stephen Prickett, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, The fact that Dickens also cites the New Testament extensively is evidenced in Schlicke's *Companion*, p. 40.

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In particular the last example illustrates how wittily Dickens uses quotations, patterns, motifs and references from various sources and creates an intertextual montage to make us aware of the fact that Victorians preferred to think in terms of typology. In this respect, the modern Dickensian arks are symbolic vessels expressive of the hope that the diluvian torrents of modernity can eventually be checked or at least diminished. As we can see, Dickens, the reader of biblical, early modern and contemporary texts, was not just a collector of resonant names, titles and phrases, but an author who fashioned textual structures in the awareness of the presentness of the past, knowing that the creation of texts consisted not so much in an arbitrary mixture of words or semiotic signs as in a typological composition of textual fragments taken from various contexts.

The articles in this book hope to prove that Dickens could not only 'do the police in different voices,' but that he was able to conjure up a kaleidoscope of worlds in myriads of voices. Showing Dickens as a reader of so heterogeneous writers such as Sir Philip Sidney, Cervantes, Jonathan Swift and Tobias Smollett, the essays try to prove that he could not help fashioning chequered worlds, in which ideas of Renaissance chivalry glaringly clashed with 18th-century concepts of misanthropy. That Dickens's novels are the arenas where cultures come into conflict, where modernity in the form of mesmerism, phrenology and galvanism encounters traditions of the *commedia dell'arte* and where the fully fledged *homo oeconomicus* meets the epitome of pre-industrialised inefficiency will be highlighted before the backdrop of Dickens's rich reading lists. To what extent Dickens's notion of reading also encompassed visual culture becomes evident not so much in the fact that Dickens was also keen on enacting and performing his or other writers' texts as in the way he enjoyed expanding and commenting on paintings and illustrations in his works. In the end, it would certainly be most tempting to see the extent to which Dickens used iconological patterns from Renaissance or contemporary paintings (Pre-Raphaelites) which he then translated into or re-moulded in his novels.

The ambitious project of tracing Dickens's reading lists would never have materialised if scholars from all over Europe had not been prepared to come to Vechta in the busy year of the bicentenary to discuss Dickens as a reader, as a recipient and user of literature, non-literary texts and visual culture and thus to help to free Dickens from the still virulent German curse of being scarcely more than a prolific writer of adventure books and Christmas stories for children. Moral and financial support for this came from my university, which logistically helped and encouraged me to convene vital parts of the international Dickens community, and the Thyssen foundation, which also generously financed the publication of this volume. Next to the contributors to this book, who willingly provided the substance and flesh for my idea which otherwise might never have gone beyond Mr Dick's sketchy outline, my heartfelt thanks go to my co-editor,

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Dieter Koch MA, and to my assistant Oliver Schmidt BA, who unwaveringly proof-read the articles and never tired of complying with the spontaneous overflow of my editorial ideas. The service they thus rendered the commemoration of Dickens as a reader will always be dearly remembered.

Vechta, November 2013 Norbert Lennartz

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2. Dickens and the Literary Tradition

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Matthias Bauer (Tübingen)

2.1 Dickens and Sir Philip Sidney: Desire, Ethics, and Poetics

While Dickens has been studied frequently as a reader of Shakespeare[1] and, to a somewhat lesser extent, of Ben Jonson,[2] his relationship to other Early Modern writers has obviously been regarded as a comparatively unrewarding field of critical enquiry. A possible exception is Sir Philip Sidney, to whom some critical attention has been paid,[3] but whose significance for Dickens has not yet been fully recognised. The relationship deserves further study not so much because Sidney is an important 'source' of Dickens or has in some more or less indirect fashion 'influenced' him but because Sidney, in the nineteenth century, became a kind of legend or myth[4] and could thus be used by Dickens as a point of reference in making certain (fictional) statements about issues connected to that myth. Sidney, to Dickens, served as a means of giving voice both to the frustration of desire and to ways of sublimation; he helped him articulate the realisation of self-denial and charity as forms of Christian nobility and thus contributed to establishing Dickens's own poetological convictions. Reading Sidney, in this context, does not just mean reading his works but also his life and even the visual images that became part of the legend and with which the image of Dickens himself, as I hope to show, became associated.

1 See e. g. Gager, Valerie L. (1996), *Shakespeare and Dickens: The Dynamics of Influence,* Cambridge: Cambridge UP; Poole, Adrian / Scott, Rebekah (2011), 'Charles Dickens' *Scott, Dickens, Eliot, Hardy. Great Shakespeareans*, vol 5, ed. Adrian Poole, New York: Continuum, pp. 53 – 94.

2 See e. g. Martino, Mario (2000), 'On Dickens and Ben Jonson' *Dickens: The Craft of Fiction and the Challenges of Reading,* ed. Rossana Bonadei et al. Milan: Unicopli, pp. 140 – 52; Tambling, Jeremy (2012), 'Dickens and Ben Jonson' *English* 61, pp. 4 – 25.

3 See Endicott, Annabel (1967), 'Pip, Philip and Astrophel: Dickens's Debt to Sidney?' *Dickensian* 63, pp. 158 – 62. LeVay, John (1987), 'Sidney's Astrophel 21 and Dickens' *Great Expectations*' *Explicator* 45, pp. 6 – 7; Reed, Jon B. (1990), 'Astrophil and Estella: A Defense of Poesy' *SEL* 30, pp. 655 – 78.

4 See Gouws, John (1990a), 'Fact and Anecdote in Fulke Greville's Account of Sidney's Last Days' *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements*, ed. M. J. B. Allen / Dominic Baker-Smith / Arthur F. Kinney / Margaret M. Sullivan, New York: AMS Press, pp. 62 – 82, who does not, however, refer to Dickens.

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1. Astrophil and Pip

In 1967, Annabel Endicott (Patterson), modestly phrasing the title of her essay as a question, pointed out a number of remarkable links between *Great Expectations* and Sir Philip Sidney. In 'Pip, Philip and Astrophil: Dickens's Debt to Sidney?' she suggests that "Sidney seems to have been the inspiration, in more ways than one, for Dickens's own study of what it means to be a gentleman" (p. 158).[5] To Dickens, the very notion of the gentleman must indeed have been associated with Sidney, since he referred to him in *A Child's History of England* (1851 – 53) as "one of the best writers, the best knights, and the best gentlemen, of that or any age."[6] Thus, when Pip, the protagonist of *Great Expectations*, "want[s] to be a gentleman" (p. 116), it is by no means surprising that Sir Philip Sidney appears in the background as a model. The relationship is not entirely based on comical contrast, especially when we consider Sidney's persona Astrophil. Endicott points out that even the title of Dickens's novel establishes the connection to Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella.* In Sonnet 21, Astrophil agrees with his friend, who has accused him of disabusing his mind by devoting himself to the "vain thoughts" of his love, and who has reminded him that "to [his] birth [he] owe[s] / Nobler desires, lest else that friendly foe, / Great expectation, wear a train of shame" (ll. 6 – 8). Stella, the "star of heavenly fire" and "loadstar of desire" (8th song, ll. 31 – 32) in Sidney, has her counterpart in Estella, whose "light" comes "along the dark passage" in Satis House towards Pip "like a star" (p. 54).

Furthermore, Endicott sees the "chirp of 'Philip Pirrip,'" abbreviated as Pip, as an allusion to Philip-Astrophil, who poses (in Sonnet 83) as the jealous rival of the bird, "that Sir Phip," cherished by Stella. Pip/Phip/Philip is a name that evokes a whole row of literary ladies' pet sparrows, marked by Skelton's *Philip Sparrow* and Gascoigne's *The Praise of Phillip Sparrow*; especially in the latter case the bird represents lecherous desire.[7] Sidney's Astrophil, who sees the bird lie "In lilies' nest, where love's self lies along" takes up this association. In *Great Expectations*, the whole complex of bird imagery, jealousy and desire is evoked in parody by the Finches, a kind of drinking and quarrelling club of young men, of which both Pip and Bentley Drummles are members. This is where Pip ex-

5 For the concept of the gentleman in Victorian society and literature, see Gilmour, Robin (1981), *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*, London: Allen & Unwin, who does not, however, refer to Sidney.

6 Dickens, Charles (1958), *Master Humphrey's Clock* and *A Child's History of England*, intr. Derek Hudson, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 426, quoted by Endicott (1967), p. 158.

7 The background to this is formed by Catullus's elegy on Lesbia's sparrow; cf. Duncan-Jones's note in Sidney, Sir Philip (2002), *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 367.

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periences the fiercest pangs of jealousy, as Drummles toasts a lady and calls "upon the company to pledge him to 'Estella' […] of Richmond" (p. 281). The place is another hint. There is a parallel between Bentley Drummles and the "Rich fool" (Sonnet 24) to whom Stella is married, which is assumed to be an allusion to Robert, Lord Rich, the husband of Penelope Devereux, the model of Astrophel's desired lady. Endicott (p. 160) stresses that "Estella is in [Pip's] mind inevitably 'Lady Rich' […] for when sent away to Richmond to break other hearts than his, she tells Pip: 'I am to write to her [Miss Havisham] constantly and see her regularly, and report how I go on – I and the jewels'" (p. 247).

The jewels evoke and transform an image traditionally connected to the admired lady of the Petrarchan lover; thus in the second song of *Astrophil and Stella*, Astrophil, who espies Estella sleeping, makes up his mind to teach his "heavenly jewel" "that she, / When she wakes, is too too cruel" (l. 1, ll. 3 – 4). Sidney's alter ego in this song famously ventures to steal not more than a kiss before Stella wakes up and he flees (chiding himself "for not more taking," l. 28). One single kiss is also all that Pip gets from an intensely cruel Estella, marking their closest physical contact, but this very similarity in Astrophil's and Pip's stories of desire and renunciation also points to a crucial difference. Whereas the kiss is stolen from Stella, with Astrophil being mainly defeated by his own timidity (cf. 2nd Song, l. 16), the kiss is granted by Estella in chapter 11 as a mark of condescension and contempt:

> […] she stepped back into the passage, and beckoned me.
> 'Come here! You may kiss me if you like.'
> I kissed her cheek as she turned it to me. I think I would have gone through a great deal to kiss her cheek. But, I felt that the kiss was given to the coarse common boy as a piece of money might have been, and that it was worth nothing. (p. 84)

Endicott stresses that the "Petrarchan mistress is cold and heartless in the mind of her lover, and in so far as she rejects *him*. But Estella believes herself to be heartless in actuality, and cold to all. Is this the Petrarchan idea come alive, Pygmalion fashion, and made psychologically credible because of our belief in indoctrination?"[8] (i. e. Miss Havisham's indoctrination). The crucial difference between *Great Expectations* and *Astrophil and Stella*, I think, consists in the fact that Astrophil is truly convinced of Stella's beauty reflecting her worth; he suffers, begs Stella: "treat not so hard your slave" and exclaims that "No doom should make one's heaven become his hell" (Sonnet 86, ll. 9, 14), but all this is because her virtue as a married woman, and his own moral convictions as well as the great expectation connected with his noble birth, are in conflict with his desire, his "rage of longing" (10th Song, l. 24). Pip, by contrast, cannot locate

8 Endicott (1967), p. 160.

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nobility anywhere: Estella is brainwashed and he himself does not recognise any truly noble standards to live up to; he conceives of great expectations only in terms of money and an elevated social position being bestowed upon him, as he vaingloriously thinks, by the good fairy Miss Havisham. The conflict consists in a clash between his own version of the rage of longing, when "poor I lay burning and tossing on my bed" (p. 427) and the fact that there is nothing really worth longing for.

In Sonnet 71, Astrophil describes Stella as an example of "How virtue may best lodged in beauty be;" "And not content to be perfection's heir / Thy self, dost strive all minds that way to move, / Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair; / So while thy beauty draws the heart to love, / As fast thy virtue bends that love to good" (l. 2; ll. 9 – 13). Astrophil's problem, if one may put it that way, is that this purely rational refinement does not fully work, as he realises and makes us realise when he exclaims in the last line of the sonnet: "But ah, desire still cries: 'Give me some food.'"[9] Dickens evokes this Sidneyean context in order to make us see more clearly the kind of love figured forth by what Pip feels for Estella. In chapter 29 (II.10), Pip the narrator gives us a "clue by which [he is] to be followed into [his] poor labyrinth" when he stresses that he did not "invest [Estella] with any attributes save those she possessed:"

> According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot be always true. The unqualified truth is, that when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me, than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection. (p. 212)

A few lines before, Pip dreams that Miss Havisham "reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin – in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess." In other words, Pip's illusion about himself is what lies at the heart of his frustrated love. If there is no "great expectation" by others connected with his birth and no early promise of valour and talent that he has to live up to like Astrophil, this is the very point of Dickens's response to Sidney. When Dickens regards Sidney as "one of the best knights […] of that or any age," he implicitly acknowledges the timelessness of the role; but this role is not to be played as he has Pip daydream it. The great expectation of which Pip, for such a long time, remains unaware, is the promise given by his fear-inspired but still valorous act

9 Cf. *Great Expectations:* "'Been bolting his food, has he?' cried my sister," p. 11.

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of solidarity as a very young child, when he helped Magwitch survive and escape by providing him with food and a file; this is underscored by the brotherly solidarity of Joe, which also forms a part of his childhood and remains similarly unacknowledged until Pip has undergone severe pain and suffering. It is, in the main, an expectation of nobility which has little to do with any form of (public) acknowledgement by others or with social position.[10]

But where does this leave us with regard to Pip's desire, Pip's "love of a man"? The novel, as we know from the ambiguity of its many endings,[11] has no real answer to this. Meaning and fulfilment are shown to be possible in the act of brotherly love (or act of care on the most fundamental level of human existence) but not in sexual desire. The only hint at such a meaning is, as far as I can see, Pip's very "ecstasy of unhappiness" in chapter 44 (p. 334), when he takes leave of Estella. He exclaims that "[y]ou have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with. […] in this separation I associate you only with the good, and I will faithfully hold you to that always" (p. 333). I take this to mean that Pip's desire, in all its frustration, is a sign of that very humanity which enables him to be "good" and enables his mind to produce a "graceful fancy."[12] In a certain way, ethics and aesthetics transcend desire, but this is not an act of sublimation like the one of which Astrophil despairs. Desire is rather shown to be the human condition which must be acknowledged in order to realise what is good and imaginative.

2. The Sidney Myth

Dickens's use of Sidney as a foil to his story of a young man's frustrated desire and his wish to become a gentleman is part of a larger picture which includes the image of Dickens himself and the ideals with which his work has been associated.

10 Reed regards the reference to *Astrophil and Stella* in *Great Expecations* as the evocation of a "chivalric code" which is to be recognised as outmoded and has to be overcome. "Attempts to justify the conflicting claims of an honourable ambition and a devotion to an unchanging social order created many examples of twisted logic in the nineteenth century. For Dickens, however, once the Petrarchan model is discarded, this conflict is no longer a problem, for what is to be expected is a far more flexible social order, one which allows ambition and ability to be rewarded" Reed, Jon B. (1990), 'Astrophil and Estella: A Defense of Poesy' *SEL* 30, pp. 655 – 78, p. 675. Whereas Reed thus reads Dickens as ultimately dismissing Sidney, I think that the evocation of Sidney throughout Dickens rather shows the adaptation and transformation of the ethos he represents to him.

11 See Rosenberg, Edgar (1981), 'Last Words on Great Expectations: A Textual Brief on the Six Endings' *Dickens Studies Annual* 9, pp. 87 – 115.

12 This may be compared to Sonnet 45 of *Astrophil and Stella* (*Major Works,* p. 170), in which "fancy drawn by imaged things" (l. 9) is said to be more productive of grace than real life ("with free scope more grace does bring / Than servant's wreck;" ll. 10 – 11).

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A perhaps somewhat surprising approach to this is opened up through one of the most traumatic events of Dickens's later life. "On Friday 9 June [1865]," Michael Slater writes, "he was returning to London by the so-called 'tidal train' from Folkestone, having left Paris at 7 a.m. Nelly [Ellen Ternan] and an older lady, presumably her mother, were returning with him."[13] At Staplehurst, the train crashed, leaving ten people dead and "many others seriously wounded." Dickens, after taking care of the Ternans, "turned to helping other survivors, and clambered back into his wrecked carriage to fetch his brandy-flask for the purpose."[14] A picture of the accident appeared in the *Illustrated London News*, showing one of the carriages dangling in mid-air,[15] and this is the version that appeared in the weekly *Penny Illustrated Paper* on June 24, 1865 (fig. 1).[16]

Figure 1: The Staplehurst Railway Accident, *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 24 June 1865.

I would like to suggest that this illustration in one of the first illustrated papers for the masses deliberately fused the public image of Dickens with that of "one of the best writers, the best knights, and the best gentlemen, of that or any age," for

13 Slater, Michael (2009), *Charles Dickens*, New Haven: Yale UP, p. 534.
14 Ibid., p. 535.
15 See the picture e. g. at http://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Staplehurst_rail_crash.jpg; cf. also the photograph at http://www.kentishpeople.co.uk/article.php?id=1.
16 Reprinted courtesy of The British Library.

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it evoked the most famous story about Sir Philip Sidney, fuelling the myth of the poet-knight, which Dickens himself retold (it goes back to the biography by Sidney's friend Fulke Greville)[17] in *A Child's History of England*, namely the story of his wounding and death at the battle of Zutphen in the Netherlands:

> This was Sir Philip Sidney, who was wounded by a musket ball in the thigh as he mounted a fresh horse, after having had his own killed under him. He had to ride back wounded, a long distance, and was very faint with fatigue and loss of blood, when some water, for which he had eagerly asked, was handed to him. But he was so good and gentle even then, that seeing a poor badly wounded common soldier lying on the ground, looking at the water with longing eyes, he said, 'Thy necessity is greater than mine,' and gave it up to him. This touching action of a noble heart is perhaps as well known as any incident in history—is as famous far and wide as the blood-stained Tower of London, with its axe, and block, and murders out of number. So delightful is an act of true humanity, and so glad are mankind to remember it. (p. 426)

The ethical dimension of Sidney as a model writer, knight and gentleman is epitomised in this story, which to Dickens, in his quite unchild-like history of atrocities and abuses, is a thoroughly exceptional one. This interpretation of Sidney's act of self-denial as counterbalancing a history of cruelty is Dickens's own,[18] whereas other additions to Fulke Greville's original account, in particular the emphasis on Sidney as a 'gentleman,' goes back to David Hume's *History of England* (1754 – 62),[19] which was frequently reprinted.[20] Hume also seems to be the source of specifying the nature of the drink in question as water.[21] Apart from Hume, the legend (and Sidney's chivalry in general) was taken up in numerous popular publications throughout the nineteenth century.[22]

17 On Fulke Greville's account, see Gouws, John (1990).

18 Thus Dickens's use of Sidney is not example of using "the nineteenth-century myth of the gentleman as a manifestation of ruling class strategy." Gouws, John (1990b), 'The Nineteenth-Century Development of the Sidney Legend' *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements*, ed. M.J.B. Allen / Dominic Baker-Smith / Arthur F. Kinney / Margaret M. Sullivan, New York: AMS Press, pp. 251 – 60, p. 259.

19 Hume speaks of "the most perfect model of an accomplished gentleman." Hume, David (1819), *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688.* Vol 6. London: Christie et al., p. 113; cf. Gouws, John (1990b), p. 253.

20 Gouws (1990b), p. 253.

21 "After this last action, while he was lying on the field mangled with wounds, a bottle of water was brought to him to relieve his thirst; but observing a soldier near him in a like miserable condition, he said, *This man's necessity is still greater than mine:* and resigned to him the bottle of water." Hume (1819), p. 114; cf. Gouws (1990b), p. 253.

22 Gray's edition of Sidney's *Works* in 1829 included a biography that refers to the scene (pp. 44 – 45). Cf. also Zouch's biography (first published 1808), in which Sidney is called "the most accomplished gentleman" Zouch, Thomas (1808, 2nd ed. 1809), *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Sir Philip Sidney*, York: Thomas Wilson, p. 371. The appearance of biographies by Davies (1859), Bourne (1862) and Lloyd (1862) confirms that interest in Sidney was high at the time of Dickens's later works. Sidney as a model gentleman and/or the story

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Dickens, who had been shaken by the crash himself, handing a hatful of water (rather than brandy) to a beautiful young woman clearly suggests that the reader is to see him as the heir of the Elizabethan poet. I think that this was an allusion to be grasped by a broad readership, for it is just evoked by the story told by the picture but by the composition itself that subtly works on the spectator's memory. When one looks at popular pictorial representations of the story of the common soldier's greater necessity, one notices the similarity to the picture in the *Penny Illustrated Paper*. Representations of Sidney's act of generosity at the battle of Zutphen frequently show a central semi-recumbent figure in white dress in interaction with a darker figure to the left, before a background of confusion and turmoil. Benjamin West painted the scene in 1806 "in the *exemplum virtutis* tradition;"[23] he has two persons interacting with Sidney; one who hands him the water and one who is pointed out by Sidney as its more needful recipient. When the picture is inverted (as it frequently happens when a painting turned into a print) the similarity to the scene in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* becomes quite obvious.[24]

Gouws notices the "slightly effeminate, sentimentally Christlike face" of West's Sidney.[25] However that may be, both the unbearded face and the whiteness of the dress certainly evoke a notion of femininity; the 'male' heroic valour of the soldier is meant to go together with the 'female' virtue of self-denial. This is what we can also observe, in varying degrees, in other nineteenth-century representations of the scene; the whiteness, for example, can be observed in this print

of Sidney's resigning the water to the dying soldier were also frequently referred to in periodical articles during Dickens's lifetime. Examples are *The Sheffield Mercury* of 26 February 1831, in which the "true definition of a gentleman" is exemplified by Sir Philip Sidney, or *The Morning Chronicle* of 5 October 1855, in which Sidney is called "the model of what noble, chivalrous, gently, and high-hearted man should be." The author adds, though, that Sidney's "great reputation in his own days has hardly survived to ours." This was soon to change in the later 1850s and the 1860s. Further examples are 'The Death of Sir Philip Sidney' in *The Manchester Times* of 16 March 1861 and 'Sir Philip Sidney's Last Charge' in *The Manchester Times* of 13 December 1862 (the latter a reprint from Lloyd, Julius [1862], *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*. London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, pp. 199 – 202). Cf. also the imaginary conversation of Sidney and Fulke Greville by Charles Knight, which was published in *Household Words* (1852; cf. Endicott [1967], pp. 161 – 62). For further references to Sidney's reputation in the nineteenth century, see Gouws (1990b) and Garrett, Martin, ed. (1996), *Sidney: The Critical Heritage*, London: Routledge.

23 Gouws (1990b), p. 257. Zouch, in retelling the story, stresses that "[f]ew incidents can afford a more animating and affecting subject to the historical painter," p. 257.

24 Woodmere Art Museum Philadelphia. The Wikimedia Commons file of the painting is to be found at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin_West_-_The_Fatal_Wounding_of_Sir_Philip_Sidney.jpg. Gray in his 1829 edition of Sidney's works speaks of West's "celebrated historical painting" (44; he may possibly refer to an earlier painting of West's).

25 Gouws (1990b), p. 257.

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that was made by John Rogers after the 18th-century history and portrait painter John Francis Rigaud (fig. 2).[26]

Figure 2: John Rogers (after John Francis Rigaud), The Death of Sir Philip Sidney (circa 1830).

26 Reprinted courtesy of The British Museum. See http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3095122&partId=1. Dickens used the name of the painter for a character (one of his worst criminals) in *Little Dorrit*.

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The impression is even stronger in this illustration from *Cassell's Illustrated History of England* of 1858,[27] which, partly because of the long coat and the cushion or flag on which Sidney is seated, is not entirely unlike the picture of the woman in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* (fig. 3).

Figure 3: Death of Sir Philip Sidney at the Battle of Zutphen, *Cassell's Illustrated History of England* (1858).

A few years after the Staplehurst accident, a similar example appeared in Laura Jewry Valentine's anthology of texts, accompanied by images, representing 24 human virtues called *The Nobility of Life* (1869).[28] The picture of Sidney appears as the representative of 'Self-denial' (pp. 129 – 36) (fig. 4).

When seen in the context of visual representations of Sidney's death, it seems plausible to say that the picture of Dickens at Staplehurst in *The Penny Illustrated Paper* fuses the representation of the noble youthful poet with a Victorian version of the (elderly) knight caring for the damsel in distress.

The composition itself, I think, goes further back, as the recumbent, illuminated figure of a wounded person or corpse takes up the pictorial convention of representing the lamentation of Christ, of which I have selected just one more or less random example, a seventeenth-century painting by Anthony van Dyck. Especially when inverted (like a print) the similarity of composition is striking (fig. 5).[29]

The use of this pictorial motif for the death of Sidney corresponds to the perception of his similarity to Christ in his act of selflessness.[30] To the average

27 Cassell, John (1858), *Illustrated History of England,* Vol. 2. London: W. Kent & Co, p. 511.

28 Reprinted courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library. The 24 'graces and virtues' also include religion and the four ages of life (childhood, youth, manhood, age).

29 Reprinted courtesy of Lukas – Art in Flanders. The painting is in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp.

30 An example of this perception can be found in 'St Paul's Cathedral – Story of Sir Philip Sidney' by Grace Greenwood (i. e. Sara Jane Lippincott), which is one of her *Stories and*

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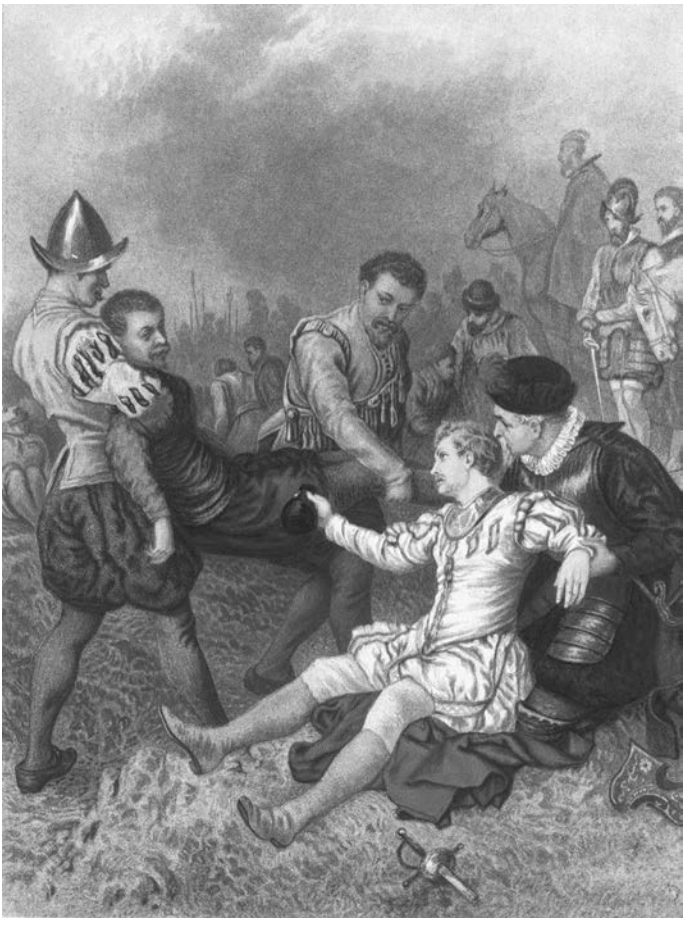

Figure 4: Self-Denial: Sir Philip Sidney at Zutphen, *The Nobility of Life* (1869).

Legends for Travel and History: "Oh, in all his noble life, Sir Philip Sidney had never done so grand a deed as this! It was, in truth, a Christ-like act, though performed upon a bloody battle-field, – and it will be remembered and honored while the world endures. […] we may feel assured that, for the gift of that 'cup of cold water' to the dying soldier, his soul drunk deep of 'the waters of life that now from the throne of the Lamb,' and make beautiful forever the Paradise of God' Greenwood, Grace [Sara Jane Lippincott] (1857), 'St Paul's Cathedral – Story of Sir Philip Sidney' *Stories and Legends for Travel and History*, Boston: Tricknor and Fields, 1857, pp. 25 – 41, pp. 40 – 41. On notions of likeness to Christ in Dickens, see Bauer, Matthias (2013), 'Werk und Ebenbild: Religiöse Paradigmen bei Dickens' *Heilige Texte: Literarisierung von Religion und Sakralisierung von Literatur im modernen Roman*, ed. Klaus Antoni / Matthias Bauer / Jan Stievermann / Birgit Weyel / Angelika Zirker, Münster: LIT, pp. 59 – 84.

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Figure 5: Anthony van Dyck, The Lamentation of Christ (circa 1629) (mirror-inverted).

reader of the *Penny Illustrated Paper* the aesthetic and literary suggestiveness of the water-giving Dickens need not have been a matter of conscious reflection. Nevertheless, the illustrator and the editors of the paper subtly create an icon of Dickens by establishing a sort of subconscious link to a popular pictorial tradition. In doing so, they take up the notions of the literary artist, the knight, and the selfless Christian that were fused in the representation of Sidney and rearrange them by making Dickens hand the water to the angelic but suffering young woman, who assumes the position of the writer-hero. We are thus reminded that the feminine virtue of selflessness, presented by Dickens himself in such characters as Agnes (in *David Copperfield*) and Little Dorrit, but also in Joe (in *Great Expectations*) is a human quality pertaining to men and women alike.[31]

31 The example may also help us see that Dickens's representations of women are by no means attempts to simply buttress an ideology of the 'angel in the house' but are part of a moral concept in which the 'feminine' virtue of selflessness is part and parcel of the (male) writer's own role. For a recent rebuttal of stereotypical views by critics as regards the representation

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The perception of Sidney's and Dickens's cultural role as secular saints has served to contextualise the fact that in *Great Expectations*, Pip's process of recognising his only true 'great expectation(s)' is connected with an act of solidarity, and that the model of Sidney's Astrophil is to make us realise this through similarity and difference. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens thus came to explore the potential of Sidney's poems, whereas before (in *A Child's History*) Sidney had mainly been evoked as a cultural icon. The link is the act of selflessness associated with the name of Sidney, which is integrated into the story of unfulfilled desire. A move into this direction can already be observed in the novel written before *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities.* In this book, a notion of Sidney as an ethical model seems to be at work in the character of Sydney Carton, who is the double and counterpart of Charles Darnay, the latter having assumed a name (his real name is Charles St. Evrémonde), as critics have noticed,[32] which makes him share his initials with Dickens, their first name being the same anyway. Dickens obscured the allusion to Sidney a little (and may have fuelled other associations into the name that way)[33] by choosing to spell the name with two 'y's, which confirms the assumption that the naming of this character is part of a complex game of allusions. The characters were originally named as Charles Darnay and Dick Carton,[34] their first names together forming 'Charles Dick.' Sydney and Charles are closely linked, with Sydney performing the ultimate deed of valour which turns him into an image of Christ himself, as by choosing to die in Charles's stead he puts into practice Jesus's words that "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The picture is completed by the fact that Sydney Carton's story is one of unfulfilled love and renunciation.[35]

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of women in Dickens, see Zirker, Angelika (2012), 'Weak, sexless, one-dimensional, boring? Reading Amy Dorrit' *Dickens's Signs, Readers' Designs: New Bearings in Dickens Criticism*, ed. Francesca Orestano / Norbert Lennartz, Rome: Aracne, pp. 169 – 89.

32 See Sanders' introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens, Charles (1988), *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. Andrew Sanders, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. xviii.

33 See Sanders, *Companion*, to whom Carton "appear[s] to have been named after Algernon Sydney (1622 – 83), the republican who was arrested for complicity in the Rye House Plot in 1683 and who was tried on three charges of treason before Judge Jeffreys in November of that year. He was executed on Tower Hill after being found guilty despite his able self-defence. In court and the petitions he drew up setting forth the illegality of his trial." Sanders, Andrew (1988), *The Companion to* A Tale of Two Cities, London: Unwin Hyman, p. 70.

34 For their mirroring, see e. g. Elliott, Kamilla (2009), 'Face Value in *A Tale of Two Cities*' *Charles Dickens,* A Tale of Two Cities *and the French Revolution,* ed. Colin Jones, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 87 – 103, p. 100.

35 For the notion of sacrifice in *A Tale of Two Cities*, see Bauer, Matthias / Zirker, Angelika (2013 forthcoming), 'Dickens and Ambiguity: The Case of *A Tale of Two Cities*' *Dickens, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. Christine Huguet / Nathalie Vanfasse, Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire.

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The transformations and disguises which mark Dickens's identificatory game with Sir Philip Sidney at least partly hide the fact that it gives expression to a somewhat dangerous kind of desire, as there is the danger of ridiculous self-aggrandisement in the identification with one of the best writers, the best knights, and the best *gentlemen* of any age. The very recognition of this danger and its exorcism by means of satiric contortion shows how acutely present the model must have been to Dickens's mind. No one was more ready to see than Dickens that the nobility of self-denial, like every other virtue, was prone to being perverted (as a parallel case, one thinks of Mrs Skewton in *Dombey and Son* and her praise of natural behaviour). Thus in *Bleak House*, written at the time of *A Child's History*, Dickens scathingly castigates a character who adopts Sidney's famous phrase only to hide his sheer egotism. Mr Turveydrop is a man who coolly accepted that his wife worked herself to death for him and now expects every service from his daughter-in-law, Caroline (Caddy Jellyby).

> 'Charming! We must take care of our dear Caroline, Miss Summerson. We must spare nothing that will restore her. We must nourish her. My dear Caroline,' he would turn to his daughter-in-law with infinite generosity and protection, 'want for nothing, my love. Frame a wish and gratify it, my daughter. Everything this house contains, everything my room contains, is at your service, my dear. Do not,' he would sometimes add, in a burst of Deportment, 'even allow my simple requirements to be considered, if they should at any time interfere with your own, my Caroline. Your necessities are greater than mine.' (p. 603)

3. A Poetological Point of Reference

This image of perversion in alleged imitation (or allusion) takes us to a third stage in the relationship between Dickens and Sidney. And this is Dickens's recognition of Sidney as the first English writer of an important treatise on literary art. As far as I can see, he never mentioned the title of Sidney's work, but Sidney's blending of Platonic and Aristotelian elements in *An Apology for Poetry* with its characteristic emphasis on teaching not as an alternative to delight but as part and parcel of delight must have had a great appeal to him.[36] Only think of a

36 Sidney's poems and the *Apology* (or *Defense of Poesy*) could have been known to Dickens through Gray's edition of 1829; William Stigant devoted an essay in the *Cambridge Essays* of 1858 to Sidney and the *Apology* in particular; this was reviewed e. g. in the *Daily News* of 28 December 1858 and in *The Examiner* of 1 January 1859; the latter regrets that "Mr Stigant has omitted to present to his readers" that the *Defense of Poesy* "treats of the soul of poetry rather than of its substance" [Anonymous.] (1859), 'The Literary Examiner' [Review of *Cambridge Essays* (1858)] *The Examiner* (1 January), p. 4. Less likely is Dickens's familiarity with the *Arcadia*, even though a motif like the disfigurement of Esther's face in *Bleak House*, which prevents her from accepting Woodcourt's attentions, is surprisingly like Parthenia's story in

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statement like the following and its possible application to Dickens: "For these [i. e. the poets] indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach: and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved."[37]

Dickens's prevalent method in doing so, however, is to supply that goodness with foils, of which we have seen a sample in Mr Turveydrop. Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* is another and more complex one. She also serves to show that, to Dickens, the poetological dimension of his relationship to Sidney transcends the ethical one or rather integrates it into a wider notion of what literary creation may be and do, that is, its specific epistemological function. In Sidney's view (and, I hold, in Dickens's view, too), the writer must be regarded as the creator of a microcosm that gives us an idea of what life is meant to be. In Dickens, especially his later novels, this is rarely shown as an image of perfection but is rather presented so as to make us see truth in its false image and corruption. This is most strikingly done when the creative faculty itself is presented in its perversion:

> I knew not how to answer, or how to comfort her. That she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride, found vengeance in, I knew full well. But that, in shutting out the light of day, she had shut out infinitely more; that, in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that, her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker; I knew equally well. And could I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed, in the vanity of sorrow which had become a master mania, like the vanity of penitence, the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, and other monstrous vanities that have been curses in this world?
>
> 'Until you spoke to her the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done. What have I done! What have I done!' (*Great Expectations*, pp. 364 – 65)

The arch-vanity of Miss Havisham consists in her attempt to become a Maker in such a way that she perverts or reverses the natural or divine creation by reproducing her own despair and hurt pride in another human being. By contrast, the creative writer who presents this process makes visible the unfallen human

Book 1 of the *Arcadia.* Parthenia, after her face has become disfigured (in her case, by the poison of "the wicked Demagoras") rejects Argalus: "for truth is, that so in heart she loved him as she could not find in her heart he should be tied to what was unworthy in his presence." Sidney, Sir Philip (1977), *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 90 – 91.

37 Sidney, Sir Philip (2002), *An Apology for Poetry* (or *The Defence of Poesy*), ed. Geoffrey Shepherd and R.W. Maslen, Manchester: Manchester UP, p. 87.

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nature in the fallen one. Dickens gives expression to this in a contribution to *Household Words*, in which he ironically speaks of "the truly contemptible conceit of finding in poor humanity the fallen likeness of the angels of God," which is the artist's prime achievement.[38] It is in this sense, I think, that Dickens's deepest affinity to Sidney comes to be noticed:

> Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison, to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature: but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature, which in nothing he showeth so much as in Poetry; when with the force of a divine breath, he bringeth things forth surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam: since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it. (pp. 85 – 86)[39]

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38 'Old Lamps for New Ones' p. 244. See Bauer (2013), p. 64.

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2.2 Dickens and the Commedia dell'arte

1. Introductory

I begin with George Sand and her son Maurice. In January 1856 the great French singer Pauline Viardot (the love of Turgenev's life) arranged a dinner party in Paris for Dickens and George Sand to meet. They may have got along rather better than the often-quoted account in Forster's biography would suggest, for in another letter to Wilkie Collins Dickens is surprised and impressed by her domesticity and ordinariness: "she has nothing of the Bas bleue about her, and is very quiet and agreeable."[1]

Unlike the hoaxer A.D, Harvey who regaled us with an imaginary conversation between Dickens and Dostoevsky, I do not know what they talked about that evening. But since her son Maurice was also present, it is possible to speculate that one of the three might have steered the conversation towards a number of shared enthusiasms – for amateur theatricals, perhaps, or marionettes. Amongst George Sand's favourite 'motherly' domestic activities was the making of costumes for her son's puppets to wear – Edith Wharton, visiting Nohant le Rotrou in 1907, imagines her at work: "Here, one likes especially to fancy, Maurice Sand exercised his chisel on the famous marionettes for the little theatre, while his mother, fitting their costumes with skilful fingers, listened, silent *comme une bête*, to the dissertations of Gautier, Flaubert, or Dumas," and goes on to describe some of the products, still to be seen there today: "There they stand in wistful rows, the duenna, the Chimène, the *grande cocotte*, Pantaloon, Columbine, and Harlequin."[2]

For the wider point to stress about George Sand and her son's domestic marionette labours in the years when Dickens met them is that they were focussed around a project of renewal and rediscovery of the tradition of *commedia*

1 Dickens, Charles (1995), Letter to Wilkie Collins 19 January 1856, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 8, ed. Graham Storey / Kathleen Tillotson, Oxford: Clarendon, p. 29.

2 Wharton, Edith (1908), *A Motor-Flight through France*, New York: Scribners, p. 81, p. 83.

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dell'arte that was to have significant repercussions in European cultural history. Four years later, Maurice Sand would go on to produce, in 1860, a book entitled *Masques et Bouffons*, a compendious two-volume survey of the genre with a preface by his mother. Superbly illustrated by Maurice Sand himself (a former pupil of Delacroix), it is of pioneering significance, and commonly seen as initiating a cult of the *commedia* and its classic figures in modern times, especially, but not only, in France. Picasso painted Harlequin, Verlaine and Laforgue (the latter imitated by T.S. Eliot) explored the figure of Pierrot in their poems, and in the post-World War II years two giants of the contemporary Italian theatre – Giorgio Strehler, with his production at the Teatro Piccolo in Milan of Goldoni's *Arlecchino servitore di due Padrone* that sparked the friendship and admiration of Bertolt Brecht, and Dario Fo, with his plays themselves and such critical writings as *Lezioni* and *Manuale Minimo dell'attore* – achieved a remarkable reanimation of the whole tradition.

But what is of special interest to me here is that Maurice Sand includes the English pantomime in his book as one of the manifestations of the *commedia dell'arte*, following Baudelaire in regarding the figure of Clown as England's distinctive contribution to it, and comparing him to the Florentine *commedia* mask of Stentarello. In a brief history of the arrival and dissemination of the *commedia* tradition in England he concentrates on the Grimaldi family and makes honorable mention of the man he had met in Paris at Pauline Viardot's four years previously as an ally in the cause of the rehabilitation of the genre for having edited Joseph Grimaldi: "M. Charles Dickens n'a pas dédaigné de rédiger et de faire publier ses Mémoires."[3]

Yet to make such an assertion – despite the undeniable fact that the 'Harlequinade' with which English pantomimes invariably concluded, well into the early years of the 20th century, was one of the few ways in which *commedia dell'arte* remained alive after the Industrial Revolution – was to invite controversy. The more I read of *commedia* criticism, the more I stumble on minefields of claim and counter claim, and appreciate Henning Mehnert's comment on the never-ending difficulty of providing any sort of convincing overall interpretation of the field.[4] The first problem is one of definition, of what to include and what to exclude, and how strictly to apply any criteria one sets up, in a field where the term *commedia dell'arte* was not coined until 1750, when the 'thing itself' had already been in existence for nearly two hundred years under a variety

3 Sand, Maurice (1860), *Masques et bouffons*, vol. 1, Paris: A. Levy fils, p. 300.

4 The first sentence of his useful little book, Mehnert, Henning (2011), *Commedia dell'Arte: Struktur-Geschichte-Rezeption*, Stuttgart: Reclam, p. 7 reads as follows: "Die erste bildliche Darstellung von Schauspielern der Commedia dell'arte erzeugt schon dieselben Kontroversen und Aporien, die für die Geschichte dieser Theatergattung typisch sind und die eine zusammenhängende Darstellung so unendlich schwer machen."

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of alternative names. Moreover, the man who baptised it, Carlo Goldoni, was at that time engaged in its reform or abolition, and involved in polemical dispute with its champion Carlo Gozzi, although to add but one more retrospective complication, it is nowadays a moot point which of the two in fact did more to preserve it in the longer run.

In such a quintessentially contested field, it is not surprising to find zealots bent on denying or belittling the relation between pantomime and *commedia dell'arte*. Allardyce Nicoll in 1963 is one such: he regards the English 'Harlequinade' as a virtual travesty of its origins ("the 'Harlequinade' stands far apart from the commedia dell'arte," he writes, adding that in it "the original Italian characters were vulgarised and transformed into the knockabout Pantaloon and Clown").[5] But similar views were already current in the 19th century, as we find them expressed (albeit with a strong whiff of Gallic disdain for Anglo-Saxon vulgarity) in a book by Hugues Le Roux and Jules Garnier translated into English as *Acrobats and Mountebanks* and published by Chapman and Hall in 1890: "At the present time Italian pantomime is an extinct art. In the time of Watteau the poor masks had already lost their definite outlines, and their idiosyncracies had become misty and dim. They are now effaced, dispelled by the cloud of powder which the Clown, launched from the other side of the Channel, scattered in the air as he tumbled on the French stage."[6]

But there is a parallel history of corresponding Anglo-Saxon disdain for the French tradition of *commedia dell'arte* scholarship. This is Richard Andrews, for instance, writing in 2005:

> a stereotype picture has been created of what commedia dell'arte was (or ought to be, or ought to have been), on which Italian researches of the last thirty years should now cast considerable doubt. It is a romanticised image, clung to especially hard by some French scholars, and indeed it was created first of all in France out of the researches of Maurice Sand.[7]

Myself, I shall try to steer a middle course in these controversies. I accept of course the huge scholarly advances of recent times, and their necessary correction of widely held misconceptions – that *commedia dell'arte* is a wordless theatre of mime, for instance, when in fact it is hugely verbal, indeed one of the

5 He is equally vehement in denying any connection between another great comedian, Chaplin, and the *commedia* tradition: "In several recent books on the commedia dell'arte the name of Charly Chaplin has been invoked as if he were the living embodiment of this style of theatre. Nothing could be more in error." Nicoll, Allardyce (1963), *The World of Harlequin*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 212.

6 Le Roux, Henri and Jules Garnier (1890), *Acrobats and Mountebanks*, London: Chapman and Hall, p. 278.

7 Andrews, Richard (2005), 'Molière, Commedia dell'arte, and the Question of Influence in Early Modern European Theatre,' *Modern Language Review* 100, p. 444.

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essential sources of the use of spoken dialect in art, as practised amongst others of course by Dickens himself, or that *commedia* refers merely to what we nowadays call 'comedy' when in fact the plays performed were often tragedies or tragicomedies. But I also note the general tendency of much recent work to blur the rigid definitions and distinctions and boundaries previously accepted, which may in fact broadly favour the kind of alignment attempted here. Besides, if Sand's version of *commedia dell'arte* is indeed a romantic one, it is also the closest we have to what could have been Dickens's own, had he chosen to express it in the case of *commedia dell'arte* – that of passionate commitment to the preservation and dissemination of traditions of popular culture.[8]

Yet although we must see Dickens's contact with the *commedia* as mediated through his important exposure to English pantomime, I shall not be concerned here to any great extent with that topic. There is fine work on Dickens and pantomime by critics such as Schlicke, Eigner and Axton[9], and some promising UK graduate students are at work at present on his relation to clowns and clowning (which I will not here have much to say about either), embodied of course above all in the figure of Joseph Grimaldi, the subject of an excellent new biography by Andrew McConnell Stott which is in the process of generating much of this new research.[10] To all of these the reader is enthusiastically referred,[11] but part of my present aim is to get behind the immediate cultural context in order to try to uncover deeper, pre- and post-realist levels in the history of comedy, which help us to situate Dickens in a longer tradition of before and after. What keeps on emerging as we survey the connection is how much his fiction is likewise comprised of a gallery of instantly recognisable types, and how much it has in common with *commedia* as a tradition of deeply physical as well as verbal comedy, in which bodily gestures and exploits (*lazzi*) are at least equally essential as vehicles of signification as facial expressions, and

8 As he did choose to in the case of writing. His most important statement on that subject is to be found in Forster's biography, though not, surprisingly enough, in either the Pilgrim edition of the letters nor in Jenny Hartley's *Selected Letters*: "In these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like – to make the thing, in short, a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do in that way – I have an idea that the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such fanciful treatment."

9 See Axton, William (1966), *Circle of Fire: Dickens' Vision and Style and the Popular Victorian Theatre*, Lexington / KY: U of Kentucky P; Eigner, Edwin M., *The Dickens Pantomime*, Berkeley CA: U of California P, 1989; Schlicke, Paul (1985), *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, London: Unwin Hyman.

10 See Stott, Andrew McConnell (2009), *The Pantomime Life of Joseph Grimaldi*, Edinburgh: Canongate.

11 I have myself in addition recently contributed an essay on 'Dickens, The Pantomime and Circus' to Joachim Frenk's forthcoming *'That's the Way to Do It': British Popular Culture of the Nineteenth Century*, Saarbrücken: Verlag Universität des Saarlandes.

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violence and even cruelty a regular component of the repertoire of tricks to induce laughter.

For my definition of *commedia* here, I shall rely upon the recent work of Antonio Fava, who suggests four attributes that need to be present for any theatrical representation to be considered as belonging to the genre.[12] These are, firstly, the use of masks and masking, and their importance as object and principle of the dramatic spectacle – even if, as with anything else in the tradition, contrary examples can be found, of productions that do not use masks at all (Dario Fo himself appears without a mask in his *Arlecchino*) or of stock figures who rarely if ever appear in masks (the lovers, or *Innamorati,* are probably the most familiar example). Second is the use of fixed types or *tipi fissi*, some of them famous the world over – Harlequin or Arlecchino (born, as Allardyce Nicoll observes, at roughly the same time as Hamlet, and at least as familiar and ubiquitous[13]), Colombina, Zanni, Pantalone, Pulcinella, Brighella, Il Dottore, Il Capitano, etc – and the system of relationships and interactions they generate. The third is what Fava calls multilingualism, multislang, and multiculturalism, the fact that the *tipi fissi* were constructed as representatives of different Italian cities – Bergamo, Venice, Naples, etc – and spoke the dialect of that city, or indeed, in the case of the Captain often spoke Spanish, or of the Doctor, the kind of garbled mish-mash of pseudo-Latin familiar from Dr Caius in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a play in which Dickens himself performed. Last but not least there is the centrality of improvisation as an expressive comic principle, a method of construction, and training method for actors.

The present essay will not engage with the third and fourth of these features in their relation to Dickens, though it would be entirely possible on another occasion perhaps to mount a discussion of *commedia* in relation to his own version of polyglossia, and only slightly harder to make the necessary adjustment of terms and approach to construct meaningful comparison between it and the principle of improvisation in Dickens. Here I shall reflect only on the first two: I shall first explore some possible parallel aspects of the meaning of masks and masking in Dickens's work, and then move on to Dickensian characterisation in relation to the *tipi fissi*, though again I have space to consider only two *commedia* types – Il Capitano and Pantalone – in any detail, and even then, only in relation to one or two examples.

12 See Fava, Antonio (2007), *The Comic Mask in the Commedia Dell'Arte*, Evanston / IL: Northwestern UP.

13 Nicoll, Allardyce (1963), p. 1.

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2. Italy

But first, some basic empirical grounding: it is obvious that Dickens's clear awareness of *commedia dell'arte* as a phenomenon related to, but distinct from English pantomime, stems from experiences in Italy itself. This is especially true of the first visit there in 1844 – 45 – above all, to what he saw then in Naples – but an experience in Rome during the second visit of 1853 is also relevant. What we shall find here is that many of the most eye-catching instances of Dickens appearing to draw upon the *commedia dell'arte* occur not long after his return from the first of these visits.

Pictures From Italy, published in 1846, describes his reactions to the drama in two places – Genoa and Naples – in both of which cities he much prefers what used to be called in England the 'illegitimate' stage over the legitimate. In Genoa he enjoys being outdoors at the *Teatro Diurno*, but does not think much of the standard of acting or of the routine French dramatic fare, obviously preferring "Goldoni's comedies" which are only rarely put on there because "anything like nationality is dangerous to despotic governments, and Jesuit-beleaguered kings." By contrast, in common with George and Maurice Sand, he simply loves "the Theatre of Puppets, or Marionetti, the drollest exhibition I ever beheld," put on by itinerant players from Milan, as a wonderful 'making strange' of familiar experience. Here he might have seen spectacles descended from *commedia*, but if so, he doesn't describe them. What he does focus on are features of the puppet theatre not unrelated to the way the body is treated in Italian improvised theatre, for with these marionettes the human body metamorphoses into something machine-like and inhuman, the puppet drummer "knocking himself off his legs at every blow," and the dancers astonishing the spectator by "the height to which they spring" and "the impossible and inhuman extent to which they pirouette" (*PI,* p. 303, p. 304).

Likewise in Naples, the San Carlo opera house may be a "splendid theatre," but the singing there is poor. The place to go to "for astonishing truth and spirit in seizing and embodying the real life about it" is "the shabby little San Carlino," "without a rival anywhere" (*PI*, p. 423). Here Dickens would certainly have seen traditional *commedia*-style acting, for, as Kenneth and Laura Richards remark, "some elements of improvised playing lingered on, particularly in Naples and southern Italy, in the work of early to mid-nineteenth century popular performers such as Antonio Petito"[14] – and perhaps his remark "without a rival anywhere" includes an awareness of its uniqueness in this respect. The single most important figure of the mid-19th century as far as the continuation of

14 Richards, Kenneth and Laura Richards (2003), *Italy. Romantic and Revolutionary Drama 1789 – 1860, Theatre in Europe: A Documentary History*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 442.

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commedia dell'arte is concerned is indeed the Neapolitan Antonio Petito – famous for his representations of Pulcinella – and it is possible that Dickens saw him perform. In an account of San Carlino published in the same year as Dickens's Neapolitan visit, Paul de Musset (the brother of Alfred, one of George Sand's lovers) refers explicitly to the tenacious survival of *commedia dell'arte* there, and laments the changes that are forced upon the actors during Lent, the period during which Dickens was in Naples that year. Even so, as de Musset asserts, the *commedia* show goes on in some shape or form: "Pulcinella transforms himself into *Pascariello.* He is also a cunning servant, absent-minded, lazy and gluttonous, but he is less fantastic than Pulcinella. He wears a livery. His pleasantries lose some of their strength because of the missing half-mask. The other roles remain the same all through."[15]

We can see the impact of this San Carlino experience of Pulcinella as Dickens turns from the theatre itself to describe the life in the city outside that, in a paradoxical version of realism, he finds so faithfully reflected there. "Everything is done in pantomime in Naples," he writes, and he wakens in the morning to "Policinelli and pickpockets, buffo singers and beggars, rags, puppets, flowers, brightness, dirt, and universal degradation," discovering the place "airing its Harlequin suit in the sunshine, next day and every day; singing, starving, dancing, gaming, on the sea-shore" (*PI*, p. 413, p. 423). There, in a simple verbal discrimination – almost everywhere else in his work, Pulcinella is Mr. Punch – we can be certain that Dickens knew and responded to *commedia dell'arte* as something distinct from English pantomime.

But the same verbal discrimination recurs when Dickens renews his acquaintance with the Italian tradition at a puppet theatre in Rome in November 1853, as related in a letter to John Forster. Here, in Dickens's account *commedia dell'arte* appears again only in hybrid form, mapped on to melodrama and *féerie* in the puppet play, but once more the novelist is quite aware of the intense Italian specificity of what he is observing:

> I never saw anything more amazing than the performance […] The saving of a young lady by a good fairy from the machinations of an enchanter, coupled with the comic business of her servant Pulcinella (the Roman Punch) formed the plot of the first piece. A scolding old peasant woman, who always leaned forward to scold and put her hands in the pocket of her apron, was incredibly natural. Pulcinella, so airy, so merry, so lifelike, so graceful, was irresistible. To see him carrying an umbrella over his mistress's head in a storm, talking to a prodigious giant whom he met in the forest, and going to bed with a pony, were things never to be forgotten. And so delicate are the hands of the people who move them, that every puppet was an Italian, and did exactly what an Italian does. If he pointed at any object, if he saluted anybody, if he laughed, if he cried, he did

15 Richards, Kenneth and Laura Richards (2003), p. 487.

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> it as never Englishman did it since Britain first at Heaven's command arose – arose – arose, &c.[16]

Thus as in Naples in 1845, Dickens sees in the 'realism' of puppet performance a faithful representation of what he labels in the title of an early paper as 'The Pantomime of Life.' The conventions of 'classic realism' then gaining ground as the dominant aesthetic underpinning of novelistic and theatrical representation are consciously and deliberately challenged here from a perspective that, as Jeremy Tambling and others have noted, may have something to do with a special Dickensian sense of 'allegory,' but which is also triggered by firsthand response to a version of *commedia dell'arte*.

3. The Idea of the Mask

Giorgio Strehler and Dario Fo, mentioned above, largely determine much of what I have to say here about Dickens and the mask. Both of them link the use of the mask in *commedia dell'arte* to pre-Christian and pre-realist performances in which the participants don masks for ritual purposes, to favour the outcome of the hunt, for instance, by impersonating the animals they wish to kill and eat, or to ward off evil forces by mocking and frightening the demons that embody them. This is Strehler, for instance, on the use of masks in drama, contending that they offer a route back to a time when theatre and ritual performance are barely to be distinguished: "The mask takes us to the very threshold of the experience of theatre. Demons are awakened again by those unmoving, unchanging faces, which belong to the origins of the theatre…. [it] is incompatible with the concrete gestures of real behaviour. It is ritualistic" (my translation).[17] And this is Dario Fo, who has consistently argued that the *commedia* masks represent the features of animals – Harlequin's a mixture of cat and ape, Brighella's of cat and dog, Il Dottore's those of a pig, etc – as he describes some of the skills an actor must have to perform this type of theatre:

> One of the earliest pieces of evidence for the use of the mask dates back to prehistoric times, to the walls of the caves 'des deux frères.' The painting, the hunting scene, one goat has, instead of the cloven hoof, a man's legs and feet. […] On his face he has a goat's mask with horns and a beard […] the transformation of oneself into an animal plainly required a certain skill because it is never enough just to pull a mask over your nose or toss a smelly piece of animal skin over your shoulder. The real problem is to imitate the movements of the goat or whatever animal one is intending on capturing,

16 Dickens, Charles (2012), *Selected Letters*, ed. Jenny Hartley, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 268.

17 Riha, Karl (1980), *Commedia Dell'Arte, mit den Figurinen Maurice Sands*, Frankfurt / M: Insel Verlag, p. 24.

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> and these movements vary according to the situation. The rite of dressing up in animal skins is linked to the culture of almost every race on earth.[18]

I shall argue here, following Strehler and Fo, that Dickens himself in his childhood was fascinated by the "inherently demonic quality of the mask,"[19] as Walter Sorell puts it, and that traces of this experience are to be found throughout his work, often carried in references to pantomime and the characteristic masks of the *commedia dell'arte*. I use the word 'fascination' here with some care, not as a synonym of simple 'enchantment,' but to convey an essential, thoroughly Dickensian mix of attraction and repulsion. The pleasurable surprise of seeing someone masked – even someone very familiar, whose real face behind the mask could instantly be conjured up – seems always to have been tinged for him with terror.

A convenient place to encounter and explore this fascination is in the many monstrous toys to be found in his work. The sadistic toy-maker Tackleton in *The Cricket on the Hearth*, for instance, whom we shall meet again later as a Pantaloon figure in Dickens, has as his stock-in-trade a frightening chamber of horrors: "In appalling masks; hideous, hairy, red-eyed Jacks in boxes; Vampire Kites; demoniacal Tumblers who wouldn't lie down, and were perpetually flying forward, to stare infants out of countenance; his soul perfectly revelled" (*CB*, p. 174). The 'funny young gentleman' Mr Griggins of *Sketches of Young Gentlemen*

18 This quotation, from Fo, Dario (1991), *The Tricks of the Trade*, New York: Routledge, p. 39, is taken from an interesting University of Massachusetts Master's thesis by Dora Arreola that I found online at scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1339&context=theses, entitled *Staging through Rituals: Directorial Exploration of the Imaginary Invalid.* Arreola's account of how she was first exposed to such forms of theatre seems to me also worth quoting: "My first experiences of rituals and theater go back to my early years. In the northwest of Mexico, where I was born, there is an Easter ritual called the *pascola*, which includes *la danza del venado* (the Dance of the Deer) and other regional rituals of the indigenous Mayo and Yaqui people. The people associate the *pascola* rituals with the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The *pascolas* in my community begin with a procession that congregates at the entrance of the town. A group of dancers wear animal masks, and shake rattles and shakers made from dried butterfly cocoons with gravel inside. Some of them play drums and flutes while others dance. These dancing ritual clowns, los fariseos, wear horrible masks, entertain the people of the town, and make them laugh with jokes, mocking actions and transgressions. In some places, the dancers stop to perform the Dance of the Deer. Every Friday of Lent, the procession stopped to dance in front of my father's store. The presence of these performers was impressive, magical, and for some children, terrifying. When these performers came close to me, I ran to hide from them […]. My fear disappeared immediately after the ritual was over, and I, together with other children, started to play as if we were fariseos […].We staged the ritual, imitating and repeating the dances and attitudes that we saw, including their concentration and animal movements, especially the coyotes hunting the deer." (pp. 1 – 2)

19 Sorell, Walter (1973), *The Other Face: The Mask in the Arts*, London: Thames and Hudson, p. 15.

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of 1837 presumably has more innocent intentions, but the effects of his sporting a mask in front of a child are equally terrifying: "[H]e frightened into screaming convulsions a little boy who was sitting up to supper in a high chair, by sinking below the table and suddenly reappearing with a mask on" (*SB*, pp. 529 – 30).[20]

But the most extended and impressive example of the horrors of masking occurs in the Christmas Story 'A Christmas Tree':

> When did that dreadful Mask first look at me? Who put it on, and why was I so frightened that the sight of it is an era in my life? It is not a hideous visage in itself; it is even meant to be droll, why then were its stolid features so intolerable? Surely not because it hid the wearer's face. An apron would have done as much; and though I should have preferred even the apron away, it would not have been absolutely insupportable, like the mask. Was it the immovability of the mask? The doll's face was immovable, but I was not afraid of HER. Perhaps that fixed and set change coming over a real face, infused into my quickened heart some remote suggestion and dread of the universal change that is to come on every face, and make it still? Nothing reconciled me to it. […] Nor was it any satisfaction to be shown the Mask, and see that it was made of paper, or to have it locked up and be assured that no one wore it. The mere recollection of that fixed face, the mere knowledge of its existence anywhere, was sufficient to awake me in the night all perspiration and horror, with, "O I know it's coming! O the mask!" (*CS*, p.5)

The interesting thing here is that, as Dickens runs through his mind some possible explanations for the terror aroused by the mask, he alights upon the thought that its secret lies in its immobility. Masking for Dickens seems to suggest death, that the person behind the mask is no longer alive, and could be a *revenant* from another world. This association has important consequences for his work, since the number of masks to be found in it is legion. Indeed, one is tempted to extend the Dickensian allegory of 'the pantomime of life,' and to claim that for Dickens all faces are masks, and that face and mask are commonly interchangeable in his novels. At any rate, observing the faces of the blind in Boston, Dickens is struck by a realisation that goes in such a direction by claiming that everyone except blind people wears a mask: "It is strange to watch the faces of the blind, and see how free they are from all concealment of what is passing in their thoughts; observing which, a man with eyes may blush to contemplate the mask he wears" (*AN*, p. 31).

I deal in an appendix with some of the many instances of mask-like faces in Dickens that can be fitted into a conventional moral schema, and belong in a

20 His effects on adults, too, are not devoid of sinister overtones: "his sundry contortions of countenance, imitative of the clown in one of the new pantomimes […] were so extremely successful, that one stout gentleman rolled upon an ottoman in a paroxysm of delight, protesting with many gasps, that if somebody didn't make that fellow Griggins leave off he would be the death of him, he knew." (*SB,* p. 528)

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conventional narrative structure, derived in part from that of the pantomime Harlequinade. These are important in his work as a whole, but I am particularly interested for the moment in special examples that simultaneously fascinate and terrify, and seem to retain closer links with the meaning of the mask in Strehler and Fo's account of *commedia dell'arte*. Some of the most disturbing masks in Dickens are female: Judy Smallweed, for instance, in *Bleak House* – quintessentially "pinched," very obviously Judy to her grandfather's Punch, and thus evoking a powerful *commedia*-derived image of domestic strife – expresses in her physiognomy more than a whiff of revolutionary danger and insurrection that associates her with Guy Fawkes (her grandfather literally the stuffed 'Guy' in a cart) and the Gunpowder Plot: "a lean female with a face like a pinched mask who might be expected immediately to recite the popular verses, commemorative of the time when they did contrive to blow Old England up alive, but for her keeping her lips tightly and defiantly closed" (*BH*, p. 270). Yet more disturbing is the figure of Jackson's nurse and guardian in *Mugby Junction*, a kind of souped up version of Esther's Miss Barbary in *Bleak House:* "You are like a blight all through the year to me. You hard-lined, thin-lipped, repressive, changeless woman with a wax mask on. You are like the Devil to me; most of all when you teach me religious things, for you make me abhor them" (CS, p. 481).[21] The point to retain here, in connection with Strehler and Fo, is the connection between masking and demons and devils.

Yet perhaps the most telling and characteristic exemplifications of the principle of the interchangeability of mask and face in Dickens are less obviously gothic. They appear with considerable frequency, as instances of the cardinal principle of reified body parts and the paradoxical contrasting vitality of things – that wholesale confusion of animate and inanimate in Dickens – and as such are liable to pass almost unnoticed as the reader begins to take them for granted as routine features of the 'inimitable' style. Here are a couple of examples, the first from *David Copperfield*, employing the significant word 'leer' often used in Dickens to describe the fixed expressions of grotesque faces and masks. The character in question is the quasi-demonic Uriah Heep, and the relevant quotation a very brief one: "With those words, he retired, kissing his great hand, and leering at us like a mask" (*DC*, p. 368). This is eminently pantomimic, the expressive force thrown from facial expression onto the sinister body language of the kissing of the hand, the whole terror effect heightened rather than diminished by the absence of any adjective to qualify the word 'mask.'

The other takes us back one more time to *Bleak House*, and is equally eco-

21 Jackson goes on to thank the "golden thread" of his early years as an orphan, the teacher who gave him hope when he was "the one boarder in the house with that horrible mask, and ate and drank in silence and constraint with the mask before me, every day;" p. 488.

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nomical. When Tulkinghorn arrives at Chesney Wold in chapter twelve, secrecy is inscribed in his entire aura, which appears as an indissoluble compound *Gestalt* of face, body and dress: "He wears his usual expressionless mask – if it be a mask – and carries family secrets in every limb of his body, and every crease of his dress" (*BH*, p. 125). The sentence conveys a specific kind of terror residing in an ambiguity that breaks the surface realism of the mode of representation – that Tulkinghorn's face may not be a mask suggests in some special sense that he may not be a living being at all.

Though I shall return later to the demonic in Dickens as this is reflected through his deployment of derived versions of *commedia* techniques and themes, I now want to conclude this section by turning to the issue of the relation between humans and animals, as this is expressed both in mask and facial expression and in physical gesture and movement. Following Dario Fo, Henning Mehnert reminds us of the importance in physiognomical thinking – of which Dickens was an adherent – of perceived similarities between the shape of human faces and those of animal species, and the urge to read these as indices of moral character.[22] Dickens refers to the great authority on the subject in his time, Johann Kaspar Lavater, on more than one occasion, as he does also in *Little Dorrit* to Le Brun, in the context of the open legibility of Dorrit's face as he drives through France in his carriage building castles in the air – again a significant reference in this context, because Le Brun's drawings of human and animal faces, in an attempt to systematise the relations between them, gained widespread currency.

Yet again – partly because there is already a sizeable body of work on Dickens and physiognomy[23] – I shall look here, not so much at faces as at animal movements and noises made by Dickens characters, encouraged to do so, not only by Fo, but by Martin Meisel, who, in the process of highlighting Dickensian theatricality, argues that in the 19th century theatre "enlarged auditoriums and a broader audience in the first third of the century made gesture and attitude a more important register of emotion than facial expression."[24] In Dickens, the kinds of human animal behaviour expressed in movement and gesture looked at briefly here are almost as legion as the number of substitutions of humans and things, and so it is necessarily to concentrate on a very few only, chiefly cats.

In any account of human cats in Dickens, John Carker in *Dombey and Son* must be a major exhibit, in the novel that, written immediately after the return

22 Mehnert, Henning (2011), p. 17.

23 McMaster, Juliet (1987), *Dickens the Designer*, London: Macmillan is an obvious first port of call. I myself have also contributed to the subject a number of articles listed in the bibliography below.

24 Meisel, Martin (1983), *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*, Princeton / NJ: Princeton UP, p. 5.

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from Italy, could be considered as more deeply influenced by *commedia dell'arte* than any other. In his "sly look and watchful manner […] false mouth, stretched but not laughing […] spotless cravat and very whiskers […] silent passing of his soft hand over his white linen and his smooth face," Dickens writes, "there was something definitely cat-like" (*DS*, pp. 236 – 37). Carker is of course like a cat in his stealthy manner of stalking his victims and flashing his teeth on numerous occasions to convey his desire to devour them. This particular connection is frequently made in Dickens, and there are not surprisingly as many female feline predators as male in his work. Mrs Sparsit in *Hard Times* is a comic example of the breed, keeping "unwinking watch and ward" on her prey as, even when separated "by the length of the road dividing Coketown from the country house, she yet maintained her cat-like observation of Louisa" (*HT*, p. 206). And in the very last chapter of *Edwin Drood* that Dickens wrote before he died, there is a telling image of the Princess Puffer moving from side to side the insensible body of John Jasper, asleep in an opium trance, "as a cat might stimulate a half-slain mouse"– ironic indeed, since Jasper has just vehemently insisted on the value and meaning of the 'relief' he has recently had in his life with "the snarl of a wolf" (*ED*, p. 268, p. 267).

One cat person in Dickens I am particularly interested in in the context of this paper is Arthur Gride of *Nicholas Nickleby*, one of the Pantalones, or *seneces amantes* in his novels, that I shall examine later, though I take Tackleton the toy-maker in *The Cricket on the Hearth* as my main example. At his first appearance late in the novel, his face and the rest of his body are described at length, and summed up in a sentence expressing an entire unified physical aura, like that of Tulkinghorn: "The whole air and attitude of the form, was one of stealthy cat-like obsequiousness; the whole expression of the face was concentrated in a wrinkled leer, compounded of cunning, lecherousness, slyness, and avarice" (*NN*, p. 610). Thus Gride, like the earlier examples, takes the cat as his totem for cunning and stealth, but if we were to approach this human/animal connection in Dickens from one direction only, we would miss some of its point. Like Brecht in the famous *Mackie Messer-Lied* in the *Dreigroschenoper*, ironically placing sharks above human crooks because they do their work in the open, Dickens also gives us ironic sinister animal mirror equivalents of human savagery. An excellent example is the raven Grip in *Barnaby Rudge*, "profoundly studying a great folio volume" during the interview between Geoffrey Haredale and Mrs. Rudge, and keeping at it for a long time in parodic commentary on human cunning: "It was remarkable in the raven that during the whole interview he had kept his eye on his book with exactly the air of a very sly human rascal, who, under the mask of pretending to read hard, was listening to everything" (*BR*, p. 192, p. 195).

Lastly, a very brief note on animal noises. Just as the *commedia* masks are derived from animals, according to Fo and others, so the sounds emitted by the

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tipi fissi often imitate animal calls. Pulcinella is a convenient example, his name according to Fava an amalgam of *pulcino* meaning 'chick' and *polastrello* or 'cockerel.' This means that he is liable to make crowing or cackling sounds that survive into the classic English Punch and Judy show in the form of Mr Punch's chicken voice, produced by means of an instrument called a 'swazzle' in the puppet-master, or 'Professor's mouth.' Turning to Dickens, we have already had Jasper's wolf snarl, and we shall shortly be examining in greater detail the horse noises emitted by the extraordinary Joey Bagstock. For it is to that classic *commedia dell'arte* figure that we must now turn.

4. Il Capitano

Upon his return from Italy, Dickens immediately launched himself into another passion he shared with George and Maurice Sand, for amateur theatricals. Only two weeks after he got back, in mid-July 1845, he began preparations for the production of a play which, interestingly enough, bears the clear imprint of *commedia dell'arte.* Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* contains Bobadil, the braggart captain whose role was taken by Dickens himself, as we see in the painting by W.R. Leslie. Less than two years later, in June 1847 (though the performances did not actually take place until May 1848), he began to organise a production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a play which contains not one but two of the *tipi fissi* of the *commedia.* Not only the figure of Pistol, the braggart 'Capitano' again (whom Dickens refers to in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, in a passage which describes leaving Chatham Dockyard "somehow, thinking, as the oars dip, of braggart Pistol and his brood;" 'Chatham Dockyard,' *UT*, p. 268), but also Dr. Caius, an equivalent of the boringly long-winded but lecherous Bolognese 'Dottore,' belong amongst the many figures in Elizabethan drama who owe a debt to the improvised theatrical tradition of Italy (Parolles in *All's Well that Ends Well*, for instance, is another Capitano). When we also consider that the first mention of *Dombey and Son* ("vague thoughts of a new book")[25] belongs to early March 1846, and that this novel carries in Major Joe Bagstock the most powerful and extended portrait of 'Il Capitano' in Dickens's entire *œuvre*, there is sufficient reason to suggest, I think, that the experience of Italian comedy that Dickens had gained in Genoa and Naples in 1844 – 45 had a significant impact on his mind and art.

It is Jeremy Tambling, in his excellent recent essay on Dickens and Ben Jon-

25 Dickens, Charles (1977), *The Letters*, vol. 4, ed. Kathleen Tillotson, Oxford: Clarendon, p. 510.

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son,[26] who has done most to link Bagstock and other Dickensian braggarts with Bobadil and with Jonson's 'humours' psychology, also employed in *commedia dell'arte*. But I want to go further back than that into the period covered by Paul C. Castagna's interesting *The Early Commedia dell'arte 1550 – 1621* and before.[27] For with Pantalone, Il Capitano is amongst the oldest of the *commedia* masks, and both seem to reflect 16th-century political and social issues. The Captain is invariably a satiric figure, commonly in his earliest incarnations given a Spanish name like 'Matamoros' (killer of Moors) to reflect the Spanish presence in Italy from that time onwards, and perhaps to configure Italian resentment at this, although Duchartre persuasively internationalises him by treating him as the enemy of any common citizen "whether he was fighting for or against them. He lived by ravaging the country indiscriminately, pillaging to right and left, and roasting his prisoners to make them speak."[28] Indeed, from a literary point of view, the Captain's chief predecessor is an Italian source that dates from before the Spanish intrusion, i. e. Rodomonte the braggart Saracen king (whose name, probably derived from the Colossus of Rhodes, gives us the word 'rodomontade') in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* of 1516.[29]

The name Bobadil itself seems to have been derived from that of the treacherous Francesco de Bobadilla, the second viceroy of New Spain, sent to relieve Columbus in Santo Domingo, but imposing himself by force and having Columbus sent back to Seville in chains.[30] The empty *bragadaccio* associated with him and his tribe (after Jonson, 'bobadil' became a noun to describe characters who, like Falstaff himself, boast of military prowess but turn tail at the first sign of danger) seems to have fascinated Dickens throughout his life. Comic boasting is part of his stock-in-trade as a letter-writer, for instance – he loved to use his standard nickname the 'Inimitable' on every occasion, to report that he had been dubbed "an Intrepid" at the Mer de Glace in 1853, to refer to himself as "the amazing undersigned" or (my favourite) "the planet Dick."[31]

As a child, though, he had encountered, at least in imagination, more

26 See, Tambling, Jeremy (2012), 'Dickens and Ben Jonson' *English* 61, pp. 4 – 25.

27 See, Castagno, Paul C. (1994), *The Early Commedia Dell'Arte 1550 – 1621*, New York: Peter Lang.

28 Duchartre, Pierre Louis (1966), *The Italian Comedy*, New York: Dover Publications, p. 228.

29 Ariosto's poem itself takes off from the even earlier *Orlando Innamorato* by Matteo Boiardo (1495), which also features Rodomonte.

30 That is to say, he is not to be confused with Washington Irving's Boabdil, as Herford and Simpson do, and, following them, Jeremy Tambling. The last Moorish king of Spain, whose expulsion from Granada is vividly evoked by Irving, his name is a Spanish corruption of Abu Abdullah. (Dickens, writing to Irving in April 1841 calls him "poor unhappy Boabdil."), see Dickens, Charles (2012), p. 80. So he is clearly not Captain Bobadil, who is in fact called 'Bobadilla' in the Quarto version of *Every Man in His Humour*. See Robert N. Watson's 1966 New Mermaid edition of the play, p. 4.

31 Dickens, Charles (2012), p. 264, p. 262, p. 211, p. 130.

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frighteningly violent and villainous military figures – the cannibalistic Captain Murderer of 'Nurses' Stories' in *The Uncommercial Traveller* being a compelling instance. In the theatre, too, as a young man he had met in the flesh the kind of hypocritical military stereotype described in 'The Military Young Gentleman' of *Sketches of Young Gentlemen*, where young counting-house clerks and military wannabes ape "the conventional behaviour of captains and colonels and other gentlemen in red coats on the stage, where they are invariably represented as fine swaggering fellows, talking of nothing but charming girls, their king and country, their honour, and their debts, and crowing over the inferior classes of the community, whom they occasionally treat with a little gentlemanly swindling" (*SB*, p. 512). Such impostures are brilliantly realised in Dickens's first novel in the theatrical itinerant vagabond Jingle, hilariously boasting of poetic and military exploits – like those of the in vogue 17th-century Salvator Rosa who claims to have fought with Masaniello in the Naples uprising against the Spanish by day, and painted or composed poetry by night – in a confrontation that has not yet taken place: "'Epic poem, – ten thousand lines – revolution of July – composed it on the spot – Mars by day, Apollo by night,– bang the field-piece, twang the lyre'" (*PP*, p. 11).[32]

Later figures, like Gill Evans in 'The Perils of Certain English Prisoners,' also bear traces of the boasting *miles gloriosus* tradition revived in Italy in the Renaissance in the *commedia erudita*, now seen as less diametrically opposed to the *commedia dell'arte* than it was once thought to be. But no one in Dickens compares with Major Bagstock. My main aim here will be to show that he is something more than just a Capitano. Offering in him a tribute to the kind of theatrical art he had recently seen in Italy, the novelist draws on all the resources of the Italian comedy of masks, and in fact alludes to a number of them, to create in Bagstock an extraordinarily disturbing and unsettling mixture of the demonic and the hilarious.

"I want to make the Major […] a kind of comic Mephistophelean power in the book," Dickens writes to Hablot K. Browne, in an important letter giving instructions how he should be illustrated. This means that his role in the plot is a significant one – he is the pander who introduces Dombey as Faust to his Marguerite Edith, and so lures him to his 'damnation.' As a Mephistopheles, he is, like Le Sage's Asmodeus, a demon who observes from afar, training his "double-barrelled opera-glass," with its obvious military associations, first on Miss Tox's house (*DS*, p. 86), and later on Dombey himself, to whom at breakfast on the morning of their outing to Leamington Spa, he serves, in Dickensian allegorical style, "a devilled grill" (*DS*, p. 273).

32 A footnote to the text remarks: "A remarkable instance of the prophetic force of Mr. Jingle's imagination; this dialogue occurring in the year 1827, and the Revolution in 1830."

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The major's appearance betrays his relation to *commedia* masks, especially in their puppet versions. He is "a wooden-featured, blue-faced Major, with his eyes starting out of his head […] with hardly any throat, and a very rigid pair of jawbones, and long-flapping elephant ears, and his eyes and complexion in the state of artificial excitement already mentioned" (*DS*, pp. 83 – 84). His speech is structured around the repetition of certain key signature tunes, which constantly employ a vocabulary of devils and damnation. "Devilish sly" (*DS*, p. 85) is the most obvious example, used invariably as a boast about a self that he insists on presenting in the third person, as if it were some object or entity detachable from his body. Later he will touch Pantaloon when he flirts grotesquely with the young Florence, remarking "that her eyes would play the Devil with the youngsters before long – 'and the oldsters too, Sir, if you come to that … chuckling very much" (*DS*, p. 127).

Indeed in one respect, as we shall see in a moment, he is more essentially Pantalone than Il Capitano, for ever on the verge of death ("if you *can* make the Major older…, do," Dickens had instructed Phiz),[33] for boasting and self-satisfaction are in fact characteristics of a number of *commedia dell'arte* masks. It is equally a feature of Pulcinella, or Mr. Punch, for instance, who gives us the expression "pleased as punch," or in a Dickensian variation in *David Copperfield*, "proud as Punch" (*DC*, p. 734). Then there is Harlequin himself, to whom the Major, in his physical gesturing, is explicitly compared at one point where he "shut up one eye, rolled his head like a Harlequin, and, in his great self-satisfaction, perhaps went nearer to the confines of apoplexy than he had ever gone before" (*DS*, p. 367).

It is in this sense that the Major is an oxymoronic "comic Mephistopheles" who straddles contradictory categories. He is animate and human as well as inanimate and puppet-like, funny and yet disturbingly sinister (at one point he is said to have "laughed frightfully up in the tips of his ears and in the veins of his head") (*DS*, p. 275) – above all, a kind of life-in-death figure. Despite every appearance of being about to meet his maker throughout the course of *Dombey and Son*, he has a weird kind of immortality, and he is to be found at the end of the novel at the window, exactly where he was at its beginning.

But to go back to that beginning: it is Miss Tox's initial view that there is "something so truly military" (*DS*, p. 81) in Bagstock that introduces the anti-militaristic Capitano satire. What is 'truly military' about Bagstock is sadistic violence, and one of his most essential boasts concerns the beatings and physical humiliation he has withstood and meted out. These began at Sandhurst, he tells Dombey at Brighton on a visit to Dr. Blimber's school, letting slip the transcendent savagery of his own views of education. He imagines that Paul would

33 Dickens, Charles (2012), p. 181.

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benefit from the kind of training he went through there: "We put each other to the torture there, Sir. We roasted the new fellows at a slow fire, and hung 'em out of a three pair of stairs window, with their head downwards. Joseph Bagstock, Sir, was held out of the window by the heels of his boots, for thirteen minutes" (*DS*, pp.126 – 27). We need no discursive commentary on what the consequences of that schooling have been for Bagstock's colonial military career, for we see it in his treatment of his servant, the nameless 'Native,' in such eminently pantomimic scenes as that in which he throws a footstool at him "and swore he would be the death of the rascal before he had done with him" (*DS*, p. 124), or where, having just "thrust his cane among the Native's ribs," he subjects him to a "pelting of a shower of miscellaneous objects, varying in size from a boot to a hairbrush" (*DS*, p. 374). Nor, if we read the gesture correctly, as the Major boasts that Sandhurst "made us what we were [...] forged us," at the same time "settling his shirt frill," (*DS*, p. 127) can we be in any doubt that in essence this is all guff, and that essentially he is more about shirt frill than iron.

In such passages of knockabout physical comedy as the above Dickens is thinking, not only of Grimaldi but also of Punch – always self-satisfied, clucking "that's the way to do it" as he pummels his victims – and behind him, of the Italian puppet plays of 1844 – 5. But it is the Harlequin swivel-head image quoted above that perhaps gives us the best entrée into this aspect of the Major, who is for ever rotating separate parts of his body as if they were pulled by separate strings. "Why, damme, Sir" says the Major – to himself of course – as he tries to figure out why Miss Tox no longer appears as interested in him as hitherto, after the birth of Paul and the death of his mother, meanwhile "rolling his lobster eyes round and round Princess's Place" (*DS*, p. 86). He likewise welcomes Dombey into his own home before their fateful railway outing "with a rotatory motion of the head," and, what's more, with an animal noise, not Punch's chicken squawk but "a wheeze very like the cough of a horse" (*DS*, p. 271).

These horse noises and other compulsive physical jerks are recurrent fixtures – elsewhere for instance, with Cleopatra Skewton, in a passage that reminds us of Captain Murderer in 'Nurses' Stories' swelling and swelling before he explodes, "the Major, under cover of the dimness, swelled and swelled, and rolled his purple face about, and winked his lobster eye, until he fell into a fit of wheezing" (*DS*, p. 368). On another occasion, the condition is explicitly generalised: "after such a declaration wheezing sounds would be heard; and the Major's blue would deepen into purple, while his eyes strained and started convulsively" (*DS*, p. 87). As with Tulkinghorn or Gride, the principle of characterisation is drawn from the *commedia dell'arte*, and humours psychology, every feature, gesture and movement reflecting a single unified entity. The Major cannot change, cannot grow, cannot develop, and Susan Nipper is profoundly right in her ironic

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comment on his reappearance after Dombey's bereavement as a supposed distraction from grief: "if he's a change give me a constancy" (*DS*, p. 254).

It's an eminently materialist conception, summed up perhaps in the word "essence," employed in its culinary sense in the context of the Major at table. The Major's swelling is connected with another sinister aspect of his personality – the constant connection with eating and devouring (at one point he is compared to a boa constrictor). His body is a machine that takes in food as fuel to keep it running, as in a passage following the breakfast with Dombey where he is shown "in a state of repletion, with essence of savoury pie oozing out of the corners of his eyes, and devilled grill and kidneys tightening his cravat" (*DS*, p. 276). Bagstock would appear to be, so to speak, programmed to be the 'essence' of what he is at all times, an "overfed Mephistopheles." But, to repeat, in what is and is not a deterministic structure he stands perpetually as a result of his voracious gorging on the verge of the grave, a paradoxical immortal devil and mortal Pantaloon whose profoundly unsettling effect is to re-enact endless near-deaths, and who takes his leave of us still immutably stationed at his window having "nearly choked himself dead" (*DS*, p. 838).

5. Pantalone

The figure I shall concentrate on in this final section – the toy-maker Tackleton in *The Cricket on the Hearth* – though a rather simpler version of the Pantalone of the *commedia* tradition than Bagstock is of Il Capitano, will, I hope, also yield some interesting sidelights on Dickens's *commedia*-style imagination. Pantalone is a Venetian figure, the moneybags of the Italian comedy, reflecting the wealth of the Republic in the 16th century, his name usually interpreted as a reference to its marked colonising tendencies, i. e. its urge to plant the lion of St Marks (*pianta leone*) everywhere, and to squeeze maximal profit from those it had conquered. Goldoni remarked in the 18th century that he always signified Venice in his appearance – "the black dress and woollen bonnet are still worn in Venice; and the red underwaist and breeches, cut out like drawers, with red stockings and slippers, are a most exact representation of the equipment of the first inhabitants of the Adriatic marshes," providing valuable evidence of the fundamental principle of the recognisability of the stock characters in the *commedia*, as indeed of those in Dickens's novels. Despite the occasional nobility and generosity of his conduct in some of the very early *commedia dell'arte* scripts, which leads Allardyce Nicoll to conduct a somewhat misguided defence of him against later "degenerate" derivations,[34] he is generally treated, like Il Capitano, in satiric

34 Nicoll, Allardyce (1963), p. 52, etc.

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fashion, and shown recognisably and unchangingly in thrall to miserliness and lust. As early as in 1597, in Orazio Vecchi's comic opera *L'Amfiparnaso*, he is certainly already both miser and lecher.

And as a child, Dickens also certainly encountered him in this way, as he recalls in 'A Christmas Tree.' Here, Pantaloon carries phallic fetishes in his pocket, in the shape of red-hot pokers (in the *commedia*, Pantalone commonly wields a large phallic appendage or codpiece, the signification of which is then tripled by his elongated nose and chin), and displays his obsession with money and hoarding and theft by accusing Clown of stealing from him. But we can also perhaps catch a glimpse of a possible origin for Dickens of the allegorical idea of the "pantomime of life" for the passage blurs the distinction between *tipo fisso* and real live human being as it introduces the figure of Pantaloon, "whom I deem it no irreverence to compare to my grandfather" (*CS*, p. 10).

Perhaps with such childhood exposure to Pantaloon at his back, from a very early stage of his career Dickens began to exploit the comedy of relationship between young and old. His very first published story, 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk,' (retitled 'Mr. Minns and his Cousin' in *Sketches by Boz*) is about a bachelor of mature years who is invited to dinner by a cousin who is his only relative, and to whom he thinks perhaps of leaving his wealth. But the evening is ruined by the cousin's son, who, on being asked how old he is, and answering 'eight,' asks Minns how old *he* is. Minns beats a hasty retreat, and excises the cousin and his son from his will when he gets back home.

Minns would appear to betray only the miserly qualities of Pantalone, but elsewhere in the early writings his uxoriousness is to the fore. "The Pantomime of Life" calls quite explicitly for the reader to recognise the ubiquity of the *commedia dell'arte* figure in the everyday reality of London: "Is there any man who cannot count a dozen pantaloons in his own social circle?" (*SB*, p. 669) 'Boz' seems capable of working up quite a steam of indignation at their behaviour, declaring that, "of all the pantomimic *dramatis personae*, we consider the pantaloon the most worthless and debauched" (*SB*, p. 669), and preferring even low-class 'gents' who affect dandyism preferable to "gallantry in its dotage everywhere" (*SB*, p. 219). But he manages to offer a lively satiric sketch of one representative example in writing where the observer's curiosity balances his repulsion at the hypocrisy, affectation, greed, and downright lechery of his prey:

> Take that old gentleman who has just emerged from the Cafe de l'Europe in the Haymarket, where he has been dining at the expense of the young man upon town with whom he shakes hands as they part at the door of the tavern. The affected warmth of that shake of the hand, the courteous nod, the obvious recollection of the dinner, the savoury flavour of which still hangs upon his lips, are all characteristics of his great prototype. He hobbles away humming an opera tune, and twirling his cane to and fro, with affected carelessness. Suddenly he stops–'tis at the milliner's window. He peeps

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> through one of the large panes of glass; and, his view of the ladies within being obstructed by the India shawls, directs his attentions to the young girl with the bandbox in her hand, who is gazing in at the window also. See! he draws beside her. He coughs; she turns away from him. He draws near her again; she disregards him. He gleefully chucks her under the chin, and, retreating a few steps, nods and beckons with fantastic grimaces, while the girl bestows a contemptuous and supercilious look upon his wrinkled visage. She turns away with a flounce, and the old gentleman trots after her with a toothless chuckle. The pantaloons to the life!

But the leading Pantaloon of early Dickens is Arthur Gride in *Nicholas Nickleby*. He deserves fuller treatment than I am able to give him here, in my wish to concentrate on the less familiar Tackleton in a novella of 1845, written not long after Dickens's return from Italy. Gride is clearly endowed with the familiar Pantalone phallic equipment, "his nose and chin … sharp and prominent" to compensate for his jaws "fallen inwards from loss of teeth." Ralph Nickleby, acting here as potential pandar, makes the obvious comment: "old Arthur Gride and matrimony is a most anomalous conjunction of words; old Arthur Gride, and dark eyes and eyelids, and lips that to look at is to long to kiss, and clustering hair that he wants to play with, and waists that he wants to span, and little feet that don't tread on anything – old Arthur Gride and such things as these is more monstrous still" (*NN*, p. 610, p. 614), and it is interesting that part of it comes in the form of language commentary, for in his handling of the Pantaloon theme Dickens regularly seeks arresting phrasing to convey manifold incongruities (even Minns is described as "as happy as a tomtit on birdlime" in the company of the child – *SB*, p. 319). But here, as in *commedia dell'arte* generally, the young, in the shape of Nicholas and Madeleine, the Innamorati, eventually triumph over the old.

The first fascinating thing about *The Cricket on the Hearth* is that it provides a doubling or perhaps even tripling of the Pantaloon theme, contrasting a happy marriage between old and young and an unhappy one, again thankfully thwarted by the *innamorati*. In common with all the Christmas Books (*A Christmas Carol* easily the best known of them) it has a pantomimic structure in which, through fairy intervention, provided here by the cricket himself, the Scrooge figure, doubled in this book with the prototype villainous Pantaloon Tackleton, is eventually unmasked, repenting and submitting to Christmas celebration.

Yet as is so often the case with Dickens, it is the figure of evil that provides much of the most interesting writing in the book. Tackleton declares his negative Pantaloon 'essence' the moment he opens his mouth, bumping into the virtuous Pantaloon Peerybingle on his doorstep in the first of a number of sudden surprise entrances (like those of Harlequin in the tradition, or of Quilp in an earlier Dickens book), and complimenting him on his "pretty wife. Handsomer every day […] And younger […] that's the Devil of it" (*CB*, p. 173). He is here sowing

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the seeds of anxiety and doubt in the carrier's mind about the fidelity of his wife Dot, who has recently welcomed into their home a third old man, 'The Stranger' though he is in reality a youngster, the male *innamorato* in disguise. Tackleton is motivated first by sheer innate viciousness, but also by bitter jealousy of Peerybingle, for his own bride-to-be, unlike Dot, shows no sign of affection for him.

We have seen how Tackleton, like Bagstock, bandies about the word 'Devil.' Worse than that, his totem is not the cat or the horse or the chicken but the raven, the bird of evil and ill omen. Thinking humorously of his own pet raven Grip, Dickens depicts him in a perpetual state of "one eye wide open and one nearly shut:"

> He didn't look much like a bridegroom, as he stood in the Carrier's kitchen, with a twist in his dry face, and a screw in his body, and his hat jerked over the bridge of his nose, and his hands tucked down into the bottom of his pockets, and his whole sarcastic ill-conditioned self peering out of one little corner of one little eye, like the concentrated essence of any number of ravens. (*CB*, p.175)

That word 'essence' crops up again here, linking humours psychology with the supposed derivation of essential individual being from moralised animal figures.

But the name of Tackleton's intended – May Fielding – has of course quite other associations. This is Dickens's equivalent of Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale*, with its humorous undermining of the allegorical marriage of winter and spring, or January and May. Her surname, of course, refers not only to the commensurate spring bursting into life of fields and plants but to the great English humourist whose genius Dickens wished to celebrate and renew in his own work. And might not both comic artists owe something to the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*?

As I have said, the fun of the Pantaloon situation often expresses itself in absurd, even surreal verbal incongruity, and there are some splendid examples here. Tackleton is aided and abetted in his project of marrying May by her mother, who, standing in a line from Mrs Nickleby to Cleopatra Skewton, with its deviant tangent out to Mrs Brown, is ready to sell her daughter to the highest bidder, and who, also like them, is something of a female counterpart to Pantalone – a Pantalona perhaps – in her vanity (she is described as "an old lady with a peevish face, who, in right of having preserved a waist like a bed-post, was supposed to be a most transcendent figure" *CB*, p. 196). Mother, daughter and prospective bridegroom muscle in on Dot, to learn how happy marriages between old and young can be constructed, and here Tackleton is in his element – *Ubi sunt?* he asks – "where are your gay young bridegrooms now?" – and revels in his sense of erotic power in a wonderful surreal comparison to "a fresh young salmon on the top of the Great Pyramid" (*CB*, p. 198, p. 196).

But he overreaches himself, and descends from these heights. Not content

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with his own presumed bliss, he is anxious to destroy Peerybingle's, showing him in Satanic fashion a peep-show of Dot embracing the Stranger, who takes off his false beard and reveals himself to be a young man. Peerybingle at first plans to kill him before the cricket comes to his rescue. The Stranger will turn out to be the missing 'gay young bridegroom,' and the novella will end with a dance in which Tackleton, repenting the error of his ways, participates. In intention at least it seeks to emulate Shakespearian comedy by including as many as it can into final unity and harmony.

Moreover, in a fascinating way, I believe that *The Cricket on the Hearth* offers a celebration of sexual love. I should like to extend the approaches of commentators like Natalie McKnight and Holly Furneaux, and read at least one section of the novella as a kind of sexual code. Dot, it is stressed, is an expert preparer and filler of her husband Peerybingle's 'pipe':

> She was, out and out, the very best filler of a pipe, I should say, in the four quarters of the globe. To see her put that chubby little finger in the bowl, and then blow down the pipe to clear the tube, and, when she had done so, affect to think there was really something in the tube, and blow a dozen times, and hold it to her eye like a telescope, with a most provoking twist in her capital little face, as she looked down it, was quite a brilliant thing. As to the tobacco, she was perfect mistress of the subject; and her lighting of the pipe, with a wisp of paper, when the Carrier had it in his mouth – going so very near his nose, and yet not scorching it – was Art, high Art. (*CB*, p. 180)

Reading in this way would also explain why, when Tackleton comes on his bullying visit with the Fieldings, she seems to become nervous and lose the skill of filling the pipe, and why at the novel's end she is entirely on song again, sitting out the dance and staying in her husband's company with the instrument she has successfully lighted once more.

And of course, it would also link us back over the centuries to the thoroughly raucous tradition of *commedia dell'arte,* where highly sexualised characters and incidents abound – in Vecchi's version of 1597. It is not inappropriate that Simon Callow – a great champion of Dickens as of *commedia dell'arte* (he provides the preface to Fava's book, for example) – should introduce the Pantalone of *l'Anfiparnaso* in the DVD of that opera. Callow, doubtless, would have more to say on the subject I have done no more than dip a toe into here.

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Appendix

Dickens's plots often move towards an unmasking, as in the pantomime Harlequinade. The three main examples given here concern three aristocrats, in a linkage that is frequent in his work. The first is the repellent patriarch Sir John Chester, based on Lord Chesterfield, in *Barnaby Rudge*, providing a fairly simple and literal example of the theme. His association with masking is fixed early on by his adversary, the contrasting plain speaker Geoffrey Haredale, the uncle of Emma, whom Chester's son Edward loves and hopes to marry against the wishes of his father. This is how he confronts Sir John early in the novel: "The very last man on this earth with whom I would enter the lists to combat with gentle compliments and masked faces, is Mr Chester, I do assure you. I am not his match at such weapons, and have reason to believe that few men are" (*BR*, p. 91). That association is maintained throughout the novel until in the novel's penultimate chapter Haredale is at last able to combat him with the sword itself, killing him in a duel in the course of which Chester's physiognomy at last reveals what his face has hitherto kept hidden beneath a superficial façade of politeness and good manners: "he dropped his mask, and showed his hatred in his face" (*BR*, p. 626).

The case of Monseigneur in *A Tale of Two Cities* – usually referred to thus, anonymously, in ironic fashion, though he is of course the Marquis St. Evrémonde, Charles Darnay's uncle, "with a face like a fine mask" – is rather more complex. Again the outcome is death by violence, but this is not so simple a case of unmasking. The Marquis *is* unmasked, for his face, like John Chester's, now displays his actual feelings at the moment of death: "It was like a fine mask, suddenly startled, made angry, and petrified" (*TOTC*, p. 122). But in the same moment those features are fixed for ever, and so revert to the immobility of the mask, now assimilated to the stone heads that adorn Monseigneur's chateau. Once more here, for Dickens, the mask essentially signifies death, and it is as if Monseigneur's assassination is inscribed in it from the outset.

Lady Dedlock is a third, albeit much more sympathetic aristocrat figure in Dickens who wears a perpetual mask. Her transformational unmasking scene with Esther is altogether more intimate than these other examples, and the moral and narrative schemata, though equally conventional, are more closely aligned to melodrama than to pantomime: "My child, my child!" she said. "For the last time! These kisses for the last time! These arms upon my neck for the last time! We shall meet no more. To hope to do what I seek to do, I must be what I have been so long. Such is my reward and doom. If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered; think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask!" The simple point here is that she unmasks herself – that

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is to say, there is obviously here a person inside the mask who is not to be identified with the mask itself.

But despite the emotional intensity of this moment, there is no motif of this kind in Dickens that is not also available for parody, and *Martin Chuzzlewit* offers a splendid double example in which two pantomimic unmaskings mirror each other. First there is Betsey Prig, stung into confessing what every reader knows, that Mrs. Gamp's bosom confidante Mrs. Harris is a fiction. But the hilarity reaches its zenith when Mrs Gamp retaliates by "Now that the marks," by which Mrs. Gamp is supposed to have meant mask, "is off that creetur's face, I do not think it ever would have done. There are reagions in families for keeping things a secret, Mr. Westlock, and havin' only them about you as you knows you can repoge in. Who could repoge in Betsey Prig, arter her words of Mrs. Harris, setting in that chair afore my eyes!"

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Wolfgang G. Müller (Jena)

2.3 Mr. Pickwick – a New Quixote? Charles Dickens's First Novel in the Tradition of Cervantes

1. A Note on Cervantes and the Cervantes Tradition

The topic of this study is of greater literary-historical relevance than its title may suggest. If we look at the history of the English novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we realise that ground-breaking innovations were frequently made under the impact of *Don Quixote* with its protagonist whose illusions of bookish origin form the structural principle of the work.[1] Cervantes' novel marks the beginning of the European novel and represents a climax of narrative art, which was never surpassed in the whole history of the genre, thus belying biological theories about the process of growth and flowering and decline of genres. *Don Quixote* presents itself as the first work which is in its fullest sense a modern novel, a text which realises the possibilities of the genre at the highest level and in the greatest complexity. Just as important as Cervantes' novel is in itself as a narrative masterpiece, so remarkable has its stimulating power been in the development of the novel all over the world. Although it is a canonical text, which was never surpassed, it was never an intimidating, but ever an inspiring model. An even wider claim has been made, albeit in a more dashing way than the present writer would prefer:

1 Studies which are relevant in this context are, among others, Staves, Susan (1972), '*Don Quixote* in Eighteenth-Century England' *Comparative Literature* 29, pp. 193 – 215; Paulson, Ronald (1998), *Don Quixote in England: The Aesthetics of Laughter*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins; Müllenbrock, Heinz-Joachim (1999), '*Don Quijote* and Eighteenth-Century English Literature' *Intercultural Encounters. Studies in English Literature*, ed. Heinz Antor and Kevin L. Cope, Heidelberg: Winter, pp. 197 – 209; Müller, Wolfgang G. (2007), 'Imitation und Innovation in der *Don Quijote*-Rezeption des 18. Jahrhunderts: Drei Fallstudien' *Der widerspenstige Klassiker. Don Quijote im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Klaus-Dieter Ertler / Andrea Maria Humpl, Frankfurt: Lang, pp. 55 – 78; Ardila, J.A.G., ed. (2009), *The Cervantean Heritage: Reception and Influence in England,* London: Legenda; Brean, Hammond (2009), 'The Cervantic Legacy in the Eighteenth-Century Novel' *The Cervantean Heritage: Reception and Influence in England,* ed. Ardila, J.A.G., pp. 96 – 103.

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> It is significant that virtually every kind of novel written throughout the world since the eighteenth century has been seen by its major practitioners as having its roots in *Don Quixote*. The great eighteenth-century comic novelists (Fielding, Sterne, Diderot) all hearken back to Cervantes for their inspiration. The great realists of the nineteenth century (Eliot, Mark Twain, Pérez Galdós) model their novels and their characters on those of Cervantes. The modern novelists of the early-to-mid-twentieth century (Unamuno, Bulgakov, Faulkner) specifically sought inspiration in Cervantes' novel. Contemporary authors of self-conscious, metafictional, postmodern novels (García Márquez, Rushdie, Auster) explicitly write in the tradition of Cervantes. Perhaps the novel, like language itself, is an example of a theme and variations: all novels are but variations on the theme(s) of *Don Quixote*.[2]

This sweeping statement leaves out some important descendants of Cervantes and includes novelists who have not a very strong connection with the Spanish author, yet there is no doubt that *Don Quixote* has had a profound influence on novel-writing from the eighteenth century up to our time. This raises the question whether novels which were clearly written in the tradition of Cervantes belong to a genre of itself. Gérard Genette believes that it makes sense to understand Cervantes' work as a paradigm of a distinct genre, whose representatives have used *Don Quixote* as a model in order to apply its method of writing to other genres than chivalric romances – i. e. the same formula applied to another object.[3] For this type of intertextual genre he uses the term anti-novel, a term which seems to have been current in seventeenth-century French literature, as the title *L'Anti-Roman* of Charles Sorel's parodic *Berger Extravagant* (1633) suggests. Referring to *Don Quixote* and many other novels, Aron Kibédi Varga generalises this concept, declaring that the novel in general is an anti-novel: "Le roman est un anti-roman."[4] The term "anti-novel," with its strong emphasis on the parodic element of works subsumed under it, is, perhaps, not appropriate to novels in the Quixote tradition, many of which represent innovations in the history of fiction, transcending the character of imitations and parodies. For our purpose the term "quixotic novel," which we hesitate to consider as a generic term, is applied to works which do not just imitate the manner of the Spanish pretext, but use it as a catalyst in the process of creating new narrative forms.

If we can place Dickens's first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836 – 7), in the sequence of new departures in the history of the English and European novel

2 Mancing, Howard (2006), *Cervantes' "*Don Quixote*": A Reference Guide*, Westport / Conn.: Greenwood Press, p. 168.

3 Genette, Gérard (1993), *Palimpseste. Die Literatur auf zweiter Stufe*, Frankfurt / Main: Suhrkamp. See also Hodgson, R. (1982), 'The Parody of Traditional Narrative Structures in the French Anti-Novel from Charles Sorel to Diderot' *Neophilologus* 66, pp. 340 – 48.

4 Varga, Aron Kibédi (1982), 'Le roman est un anti-roman' *Littérature* 48, pp. 3 – 20. See also Dionne, Ugo Francis Gingras (2006), 'L'usure originelle du roman: roman et antiroman du moyen âge à la révolution' *Études Françaises* 42, pp. 5 – 21.

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which were inspired by Cervantes' model, we have indeed made a step towards placing the Victorian novelist in world literature. There are, of course, a number of valuable studies which have researched the relation between Dickens and Cervantes,[5] but in this study a wider context is opened in an attempt to try to connect the remarkable beginning of Dickens's career as a novelist with the Cervantes heritage. Simultaneously it will be attempted to be somewhat more precise in the account of Dickens's creative power in his transformation of the model of Cervantes. It will be shown that in Dickens's use of *Don Quixote* dissimilation outweighs assimilation, in other words, his creative reworking of the pretext will be demonstrated to be much more than mere imitation. A complicating aspect neglected in some of the comparative studies is, however, that a straightforward comparison between Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* is not possible, because Dickens's work was also influenced by developments taking place under the influence of the Spanish author in earlier English novels.[6] So we have to consider Cervantes as well as the Cervantes tradition.

2. Elements in *Don Quixote* Contributing to Creating a Tradition

It is quite clear that Cervantes' most spectacular achievement is the creation of his novel's protagonist. Even persons who have never read the novel are familiar with its hero Don Quixote and his companion Sancho Panza, a curious fact in the reception of the work, which was obviously influenced to some extent at least by the tradition of visual representation, which ranges from book illustrations, paintings and sculptures to comics, graphic novels and computer games.[7] But *Don Quixote* the novel is much more than Don Quixote the character, and an investigation of the seminal aspects of the work must take into account the complexities of characterisation, configuration and narrative structure. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to draw up a list of the novel's qualities which influ-

5 See, for instance, Gale, Stephan H. (1973), 'Cervantes' Influence on Dickens. With Comparative Emphasis on *Don Quijote* and *Pickwick Papers*' *Anales Cervantinas* 5, pp. 135 – 56; Goetsch, Paul (2005), 'Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers and Don Quixote*' *Cervantes in the English-Speaking World. New Essays*, ed. Darío Fernández-Morera / Michael Hanke, Kassel: Reichenberger, pp. 143 – 57; Easson, Angus (2000), 'Don Pickwick: Dickens and the Transformation of Cervantes' *Rereading Victorian Fiction*, ed. Alice Jenkins / Juliet John, Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 173 – 88.

6 This is stressed by Goetsch (2005), p. 145.

7 See Riley, E.C. (1988), 'Don Quixote, from Text to Icon' *Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 8 Special Issue, pp. 103 – 15; Detmers, Ines and Wolfgang G. Müller eds. (2010), *Don Quijotes Intermediale Nachleben. Don Quixote's Intermedial Afterlives.* Trier: WVT.

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enced English authors and thus contributed to the Cervantes tradition in literature and culture in general

The novel has an anachronistic reader-protagonist who misinterprets the world and himself in terms of the chivalric romances of a past age; the main effect of the protagonist's reading is for him to reinvent himself in terms of the books he has read as a knight errant;[8] the illusions inspired by his reading move the protagonist to travel in search of adventures analogous to those represented in the books he has read in which he can prove his valour and improve the world, a feature which differentiates him from the picaresque hero. Part of his illusive attitude towards the world is the creation of an imaginary mistress, in whose truth he believes.

The protagonist is characterised by an excessive idealism which clashes with the real world, which creates the basis for satiric representation. In the quixotic novel, there is a constellation of master and servant, with the servant holding a more commonsensical, earth-bound attitude to the world than his master, a quality which is expressed in his predilection for proverbs. The novel evinces narrative complexity, including authorial comment and fictional irony. There are shorter narratives (novellas, tales) interpolated in the story.

3. The Quixotic Tradition before Dickens

The *Don Quixote* reception in England is of decisive importance in the context of innovations in the development of the novel. Referring to "Cervantean novels" like "[…] Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Charlotte Lennox' *The Female Quixote*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Smollett's *Roderick Random* and *Humphry Clinker* as well as Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*," Ardila says that *Don Quixote* was "the canon" out of which the English novel "was modelled."[9] Thus the first full-length English authorial novel with an explicitly realised omniscient narrator, *The History of Joseph Andrews and His Friend Mr Abraham Adams* by Henry Fielding, bears the subtitle *Written in Imitation of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote.*[10] Fielding could call his novel an imitation of Cervantes,

8 The first two criteria in this catalogue are particularly well characterised in the following quotation: "[…] wenn literarische Gestalten aufgrund ihrer Lektüre [die] fiktive Welt in der Weise nacherleben, daß sie sich in ihrem Denken und Handeln mit den Helden der von ihnen mit Leidenschaft gelesenen Bücher so identifizieren, daß sie die […] Welt ihrer Lektüre nicht mehr als eine eigengesetzliche Kunstwirklichkeit erkennen, sondern sie in ihrem Lebenskreis zu realisieren suchen." Kruse, Margot (1986), 'Gelebte Literatur im Don Quijote' *Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur. Studien zu Erscheinungsformen und Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs*, ed. Theodor Wolpers, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 30–71.

9 Ardila (2009), p. 14.

10 The text quoted is Henry Fielding (1970), *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews,*

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because next to the protagonist Joseph Andrews its most important character is the quixotic Parson Adams with his Christian philanthropic world-view, which is connected with the importance he assigns to reading. His motto is "Knowledge of Men is only to be learned from Books […]."[11] In many comic scenes, Fielding shows that the erudition of this benevolent man does not help him to deal with the evil, hypocrisy and deceit of the world. However, the words "Written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes" do not only refer to the new conception of a quixotic character, but also to the style of writing with a narrator figure manifested in authorial comment and ironic techniques of presentation. Cervantes helped Fielding to create his innovative mode of narration in contradiction to the sentimental novel of letters of Richardson's stamp which he satirises.

Another kind of innovation in the English novel which is connected with the tradition of *Don Quixote* is to be found in Jane Austen, specifically in her masterpiece *Emma* (1806).[12] The protagonist of this novel, Emma Woodhouse, is quixotic in that she is bent on making illusionary matches following the model of contemporary sentimental romances. In *Emma*, Austen does not refer directly to Cervantes, but to a work in the Cervantes tradition, namely Charlotte Lennox' *The Female Quixote*, which had replaced the male Quixote figure by a female version. Lennox' "fair Visionary,"[13] "lovely Visionary"[14] is developed by Austen into the "Imaginist" Emma. Thus Austen's great innovation, the invention of point-of-view narration, particularly in its ironic version, has also to be related to the tradition of Cervantes.

The development of the psychological novel with its representation of inner processes of the protagonists is marked by female Quixotes. A famous French example would be Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

Another example of the importance of *Don Quixote* and its tradition is Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1815), in which, as has been shown, the Cervantes tradition plays the role of a catalyst in the creation of a new narrative genre, that

and of His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams; and An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews, ed. Douglas Brooks. London: Oxford UP. Studies on the relation between *Don Quixote* and *Joseph Andrews*, among others: Mortimer, Anthony (1992), 'The Manner of Cervantes: Some Notes on *Joseph Andrews* and *Don Quixote*' *Colloquium Helveticum: Cahiers Suisses de Littérature générale et comparée / Schweizer Hefte für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* 16, pp. 69 – 83; Lorentzen, Beatriz Ilardia (1992), *Fieldings komische Prosa-Epen*, Kiel: unpublished MA thesis; Huguet, Christine (2000), 'Joseph Andrews: À la Manière de Cervantès?' *Revue de la Société d'Études Anglo-Américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles* 51, pp. 59 – 76, Müller, Wolfgang G. (2007), pp. 55 – 78.

11 Fielding (1970), p. 159.

12 See Müller, Wolfgang G. (2007), pp. 55 – 78.

13 Lennox, Charlotte (1973), *The Female Quixote*, ed. Duncan Isles, London / Oxford / New York: Oxford UP, p. 323.

14 Lennox (1973), p. 350.

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of the historical novel.[15] In what follows it is my intention to relate Dickens to those significant innovations for which the quixotic tradition was, figuratively speaking, the midwife. To place Charles Dickens's first novel *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) in this tradition would mean to relate him from the beginning of his career as a novelist to world literature, which is where he belongs.

4. Quixotic and not Picaresque

For a proper understanding of *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) we have to relate the novel to the quixotic and not to the picaresque tradition.[16] It would be a gross misunderstanding of the text to conclude from the mere fact that its protagonist is a travelling hero that he is a *picaro*. Travelling is for him a means to enlarge "his sphere of observation, to the advancement of knowledge, and the diffusion of learning" (Chapter I, p. 67), an intention entirely alien to the *picaro*, who is a social outsider with an "exiled identity,"[17] a have-not, who travels through the world, entering service with various masters and trying to make a living by cunning. The principle of being constantly on the move sometimes seems to become an end in itself in picaresque fiction, belying all traditional purposes for travelling. An extreme, but not uncharacteristic example would be the visit of Jack Wilton, the protagonist of the first English picaresque novel *The Unfortunate Traveller*, to Rome: "I was at Pontius Pilate's house and pissed against it."[18] A metaphor Tobias Smollett uses for the *picaro's* being knocked about in the world is that of a tennis ball. All this is a far cry from Mr. Pickwick's motivation for travelling in search of learning. Also the fact that Dickens's protagonist usually travels in a group of friends, some members of the Pickwick Club, distinguishes him from the picaro, who has no such social network. Also Pickwick's search for scientific curiosities tends to get lost sight of. His motivation for travelling is oftentimes to help his friends out of their difficulties in

15 Müller, Wolfgang G. (1988), 'Sir Walter Scotts *Waverley* und die *Don Quixote*-Tradition' *Arcadia* 23, pp. 133 – 48; Müllenbrock, Heinz-Joachim (1999), 'Scotts *Waverley* als Respons auf Cervantes' *Don Quijote*' *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 40, pp. 139 – 54.

16 For these two traditions see Reed, Walter (1981), *An Exemplary History of the Novel: The Quixotic versus the Picaresque*, Chicago: U of Chicago P. An interesting case is Tobias Smollett, "who draws on both literary paradigms" [the Picaresque and the Quixotic]. Ehland, Christoph (2005), 'Tobias Smollett's Quixotic Adventures' Fernández-Morera / Hanke (2005), pp. 107 – 26

17 Ehland, Christoph (2003), *Picaresque Perspectives – Exiled Identities: A Structural and Methodological Analysis of the Picaresque as an Archetype in the Works of James Leslie Mitchell*, Heidelberg: Winter.

18 Nashe, Thomas (1972), *The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works*, ed. John B. Steane, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 325.

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matters of love. The only journey he undertakes without any explicit motivation is his travel to Bath after he has lost the lawsuit Bardell against Pickwick and before serving his term in the Fleet prison. But even here he starts acting on behalf of his friend Winkle again, who has brought trouble on himself. Now the fact that Pickwick is not a picaresque hero, does not in itself make him a quixotic hero. Indeed, unlike Don Quixote and many of his followers, he is no reader of novels and his mind is not damaged by any reading. But he has the idealism and unworldliness of Don Quixote and the consequent inability of dealing with the realities of life. Like Don Quixote he is outraged whenever he encounters injustice, particularly inflicted on innocent ladies and his friends. He is frequently overcome by anger comparable to Don Quixote's, but he lacks the physical energy and strength to convert his indignation into action.

If there is a *picaro* in *The Pickwick Papers*, it is Alfred Jingle, a strolling actor, impostor, specifically a marriage impostor, an impudent, yet engaging charlatan, who lives on the breadline and always manages to come up with a new trick or a flimsy excuse, a kind of negative counterpart of Mr. Micawber in *David Copperfield*.

5. From Real to Metaphorical Armour

There are many comic scenes when Pickwick feels emotionally outraged, but cannot suit the action to his feelings or is held back by his friends or his servant Sam Weller. In one of such scenes, the moment in which he is infuriated by the perfidy of the impostor Jingle, there is a reference to Cervantes' novel:

> Mr. Pickwick was a philosopher, but philosophers are only men in armour, after all. The shaft had reached him, penetrated through his philosophical harness, to his very heart. In the frenzy of his rage, he hurled the inkstand madly forward, and followed it up himself. But Mr. Jingle had disappeared, and he found himself caught in the arms of Sam.[19]

In this passage, Pickwick's philanthropic philosophy is metaphorically likened to an armour, which does not always protect him from mishaps, just as Don Quixote's deficient harness does not provide safety in combat. Pickwick has the soul of a Don Quixote, but not his chivalric prowess. There is a residuum of moral and emotional fervour in him, but he is not the man to fight physically for his ideals. As such he can be called a bourgeois descendant of the knight of the sorrowful countenance, a man placed in a context in which there is no room for

19 The novel is quoted from Dickens, Charles (1988), *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, ed. Robert L. Patten, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 210. Page numbers of subsequent quotations are given in the text.

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chivalric heroism. There is a considerable similarity between the two characters. Don Quixote also exists in a world which opens no possibilities for heroism, but, owing to his illusions of literary origin, he misinterprets the world as a place to be saved by his fighting spirit. As a quixotic figure Pickwick is not a direct offspring from the Spanish knight, but a descendant of Fielding's Parson Adams with whom he shares his benevolence and philanthropy.

The developments the Quixote figures undergo can be characterised by looking at the armours they wear. It is a significant detail that the name Cervantes gave his protagonist is derived from the Spanish word *quijote* which means "thigh," and, what is important in our context, also "cuisse," a piece of armour for the thigh. So the name refers to the hero's being armoured. In the poor condition of Don Quixote's armour, which is battered and damaged, we recognise that it is old, inherited from his ancestors. So the state of Don Quixote's armour is already indicative of its wearer's quality as an anachronistic figure. This anachronistic quality is emphasised in the description of one of the English descendants of the Spanish hidalgo, Tobias Smollett's Sir Launcelot Greaves.[20]

First, the archaic form of the name Lancelot – "Launcelot" – is to be noted. Second, the name Greaves is derived from the English word "greaves," which refers to the piece of a knight's armour covering the the leg below the knee. Thus Smollett's protagonist is, by his name already, presented as a counterpart of Cervantes's hero, whose name refers to the lower part of the thigh armour.[21] In Smollett's novel, which is set in a fictional eighteenth century, the protagonist rides through contemporary England in medieval armour, which highlights the character's anachronistic quality. Dressed up like that he astounds and frightens the people who encounter him. This is conspicuously shown in Cruikshank's illustration of 1832, which is here reproduced for its high quality and since it was created at Dickens's time. The fear of the people who are confronted with Sir Launcelot, carrying a dead man on his shoulders, the very fact that they are physically taken aback, comes out very well in the visual representation. Through his armour Sir Launcelot Greaves is represented as an incarnate anachronism in the world of the eighteenth century. In this respect Smollett's version of a quixotic character is an extreme case in the eighteenth-century novel. By way of contrast, Fielding's Quixote, the already-mentioned Parson Adams, who wears the habit of a priest, is completely unarmed, although he may appear pugnacious at times, if he perceives innocents to be threatened. Now there is an interesting scene, in which Adams defends the novel's protagonist

20 For "the textual function of the anachronism of the quixotic appearance and undertaking" of the novel's protagonist see Ehland (2005), p. 122.

21 This is English 'cuisse.' See the entry 'Quixote' in the *OED*.

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Figure 6: George Cruikshank, "The Alarm at the Crowe & Fillet at the Appearance of Sir Launcelot"

Joseph Andrews against the aggression by the shortsword of the arrogant and morally corrupt Beau Didapper. Here Fielding makes him, Adams, assume a posture recalling Don Qujixote: "Adams […] snatched up the Lid of a Pot in his left hand, and covering himself with it as with a Shield, without any Weapon of Offence in his other Hand, stept in before Joseph […]" (Book IV, Chapter 11, p. 289). In Cruikshank's 1831 illustration of the scene, Adams uses the pot's lid as a shield in his left hand and a stick in his right, so that the armoured Don Quixote is echoed more clearly.

In a comparable scene in *The Pickwick Papers*, the battle of the rival editors, in which Pickwick attempts to intervene, no such echo of Cervantes' armoured hero is to be observed. Here are Phiz' illustration and the text to which the picture refers:

> 'Gentlemen,' cried Mr. Pickwick, as Pott started up and seized the fire-shovel, 'gentlemen! Consider, for Heaven's sake – help – Sam – here – pray, gentlemen – interfere, somebody.'

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Figure 7: George Cruikshank, "Beau Didapper"

> Uttering these incoherent exclamations, Mr. Pickwick rushed between the infuriated combatants just in time to receive the carpet-bag on one side of his body, and the fire-shovel on the other. Whether the representatives of the public feeling of Eatanswill were blinded by animosity, or (being both acute reasoners) saw the advantage of having a third party between them to bear all the blows, certain it is that they paid not the slightest attention to Mr. Pickwick, but defying each other with great spririt, plied the carpet-bag and the fire-shovel most fearlessly. Mr. Pickwick would unquestionably have suffered severely for his humane interference, if Mr. Weller, attracted by his master's cries, had not rushed in at the moment, and, snatching the meal-sack, eventually stopped the conflict […]. (p. 822)

This fighting scene marks the end-point of what can be called a 'disarmament' of the quixotic persona. Pickwick interferes in the combat without any weapon, and his interference is entirely ineffectual. It rather recoils on himself and it would have made him the victim of the battle, if Sam Weller had not intervened. Yet the scene is quixotic, albeit in another way than the adventures in Cervantes' novel are. As Don Quixote, the morality-inspired knight, never achieves the ends he

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Figure 8: Hablot K. Browne, "The Rival Editors"

aspires in fighting what he believes to be evil, so the physical interventions of Pickwick, the passionately moralistic philanthropist, fail whenever he wants to achieve something good. The illustration by Phiz is an excellent visual equivalent of Dickens's graphic description. It captures the comic moment in which Mr. Pickwick is entangled in the battle, in a totally ineffectual way, about to become the victim as the third in the combat and only saved by the intervention of his servant. However, the artist cannot render the irony of the narrator's comment. This kind of ironic narration continues the tradition of Fielding's 'comic epic in prose,' which is in turn indebted to Cervantes. This aspect of the novel's style – like the ironic creation of an editorial fiction – is an aspect of the Cervantean heritage of *The Pickwick Papers* with which this article cannot deal. It is ingenious on the part of Dickens to refer in the only explicit allusion to Cervantes' *Don Quixote* to Mr. Pickwick's philosophy as his armour, which does not always protect him from mischief. Obviously Dickens was entirely aware of how deep-reachingly he transformed the figure of Don Quixote.

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6. Master and Servant

The most conspicuous analogy between the Spanish pretext and its English descendant is, of course, to be seen in the master-servant constellation. This is so obvious and has been noted by so many readers that it does not require further comment. Equally obvious is Dickens's inversion of the physical build of the two figures of the pretext. He makes the master, who is gaunt and thin in Cervantes' text, a corpulent man, "a fat man," as Easson puts it, "embodied from the shadow of a thin man."[22] And he endows the servant with a tall and slender physique. This is well shown in the illustration of their first encounter in Chapter 10 of the novel.

A rounded body structure fits the warm-hearted, cheerful disposition which characterises Mr. Pickwick, who is averse to physical activity. An armour would look ridiculous on him. His body structure ties in with his unmilitary disposition. If Mr. Pickwick is as a transformation of Don Quixote an original creation, this holds true even more for his servant Sam Weller as a transformation of Sancho Panza whose introduction to the novel gave Dickens's serialised work an enormous boost. He is dressed in a dandyish way with a striped waistcoat with black sleeves and glass buttons, a bright handkerchief wound round his neck and a hat thrown carelessly on one side of his head. He is extremely astute, witty, agile and absolutely loyal to his master, with his sharp mind and sense of reality the opposite of the idealistic Pickwick. Cervantes' and Dickens's servant figures can best be compared by looking at their outstanding linguistic mannerisms, Sancho Panza's use of proverbs and Samuel's so-called Wellerisms.

7. Proverb and Exemplum

Sancho Panza in *Don Quixote* has proverbs at his fingers's end which he tends to reel off, regardless of any sense they may make. Here is a characteristic passage from Chapter 43 (Second Part), entitled, "Regarding the second set of precepts that Don Quixote gave to Sancho Panza." Don Quixote has been giving Sancho advice about how to govern his insula. He warns him against continuing his habit of mixing large numbers of ill-fitting proverbs into his speech. He defines proverbs as "short maxims," that should make sense. Sancho answers that though he knows "more proverbs than a book" (p. 734), which all "come into his mouth at one time" (p. 734), he will be careful to utter only those that suit the gravity of his office as a governor, and yet he immediately contradicts his re-

22 Easson (2000), p. 186.

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Figure 9: Hablot K. Browne, "The First Appearance of Sam Weller"

solution by adding a string of pointless proverbs, introduced by an illogically used "because":

> But I'll be careful from now on to say the ones that suit the gravity of my position, because in a well-stocked house, supper is soon cooked; and if you cut the cards, you don't deal; and the man who sounds the alarm is safe; and for giving and keeping, you need some sense.[23]

Don Quixote despairs of ever making Sancho use proverbs properly. The issue of the dispute is, of course, the need for a ruler to speak wisely and be well supplied with maxims and proverbs. Proverbs represent, as we know, condensed experience. Now Dickens invented an ingenious counterpart to Sancho's predilection for proverbs in the form of the wellerisms. The wellerism, though named after

23 Cervantes, Miguel de (2005), *Don Quixote*, ed. Edith Grossman, London: Vintage, p. 734.

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Dickens' character, was not invented by the novelist,[24] but there is no other writer to use it so extensively and with so much original wit as Dickens. Some critics argue that the wellerism usually contains a proverb. This may be true, although I am somewhat sceptical in this respect. I would say that the important aspect of a wellerism is its quality as an exemplum, a precedent adduced to emphasise a statement. In Samuel Weller's instances of this linguistic form, the proverbial part of the argumentative structure is usually subverted ironically by the precedent adduced. The following quotation provides a rather straightforward example which can be used to demonstrate the typical structure of a wellerism:

> There's nothin' so refreshin' as sleep, sir, as the servant-girl said afore she drank the egg-cupful o' laudanum. (p. 292)

This utterance consists of three parts:

A quotation (the proverbial part of the structure: "there is nothing so refreshing as sleep"), the reporting formula ("as the girl said"), the narrative part ("afore she drank …"). The point of this structure is that the narrative part ironically subverts the initial quotation. Drug-induced sleep is not what the quotation seems to suggest. The same pattern is to be observed in the next 'proverbial' wellerism:

> Business first, pleasure afterwards, as King Richard Third said when he stabbed th'other king in the Tower, afore he smothered the babbies. (p. 423)

A great number of Sam's wellerisms do without a proverb. The following one illustrates the ironic mode particularly well:

> 'All good feelin', sir – the wery best intentions, as the gen'lm'n said ven he ran away from his wife 'cos she seemed unhappy with him. (p. 448)

A husband's leaving his wife is here presented as a highly compassionate action. The following wellerisms are no less witty, though they dispense with a proverb:

> 'He [a person calling on Pickwick] wants you particklar; and no one else'll do, as the Devil's private secretary said ven he fetched avay Doctor Faustus,' replied Mr Weller. (p. 15)

> '[Referring to his father] why, I think he's the wictim o' connubiality, as Bluebeard's domestic chaplain said, with a tear of pity, ven he buried him.' (p. 355)

> 'How are you, ma'am,' said Mr Weller. 'Werry glad to see you, indeed, and hope our acquaintance may be a long 'un, as the gen'lm'n said to the fi' pun'note.' (p. 433)

24 Mieder, Wolfgang / Stewart A. Kingsbury, eds. (1994), *Dictionary of Wellerisms*. New York: Oxford UP.

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> '[…] There; now we look compact and comfortable, as the father said ven he cut his little boy's head off, to cure him 'o squintin'.' (p. 468)

Sam's wellerisms are always very pointed. As distinct from Sancho's flood of proverbs, they receive their force from the individual effort of linguistic creation. Frequently they verge on the grotesque. They give evidence of the speaker's never-ending wit and acumen, his ideas and intellectual resourcefulness and agility, the constant capacity for amusing, surprising and, at times, shocking his (intrafictional) hearers and (extrafictional) readers, also of his knowledge and erudition, which may seem strange in a servant.

8. Dickens's Reinvention of the Quixotic Novel as a Comic Work

Sam Weller is the soul of *The Pickwick Papers* as a comic novel. The recreation of the servant figure in *The Pickwick Papers* is, next to the creation of the figure of Mr. Pickwick, the most outstanding feature of Dickens's artistic vision in his first novel. In the relation between Pickwick and Weller he highlights the tension between idealism and realism, and it is Weller who infallibly recognises and comments his master's inability to deal with the wiles and deceits of the world. Dickens succeeded in *The Pickwick Papers* in creating his own comic muse in relation to *Don Quixote* and the tradition of *Don Quixote*, notably Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*. This is evident not only in the novel's two main characters and the transmutation of the master-servant configuration, but in many other respects, such as narrative style and fictional irony. From the list drawn up at the beginning of this article of criteria defining the quixotic tradition only three items are absent from *The Pickwick Papers*, the importance of reading as a mind-shaping activity, the passion to fight physically for justice, and the invention of an imaginary mistress. In the nineteenth century, which was increasingly averse to resorting to individual violence as a means of asserting justice, a fighting champion of justice like Cervantes' Don Quixote was simply not possible in a realistic novel, so that a critic's characterisation of Dickens's protagonist as "Don Pickwick"[25] must be undertood as an oxymoron, although there can be no doubt that Pickwick as an idealist in a society dominated by pretense, deceit and corruption is a quixotic figure.[26] *The Pickwick Papers* is an original comic novel,

25 Easson (2000).

26 "If we wish to call him [Pickwick] a quixotic character, we must focus on the smallest common denominator between Pickwick and his Spanish predecessor, their attitudes towards reality and the world of ideals and illusions." Goetsch (2005), p.149. There are further aspects which relate Dickens's novel to the Cervantean tradition, e. g. the ironic style of the narration and the editorial fiction. To illustrate Dickens's ironic use of the editorial fiction, one example must suffice: "Thus Mr. Pickwick was led by the very warmth of his own good

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which is inspired both by Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and its English tradition. With it Dickens gets in line with other outstanding novelists who made their debut under the auspices of Cervantes.

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feelings to give his consent to a proceeding from which his better judgment would have recoiled – a more striking illustration of his amiable character could hardly have been conceived, even if the events recorded in these pages had been wholly imaginary." Dickens (2005), p. 27.

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2.4 Conversation and the Comic Novel: *Don Quixote* and *The Pickwick Papers*

"What is the use of a book," asked Lewis Carroll's Alice in the opening lines of her novel, "without pictures or conversation?"[1] Alice's rhetorical question to herself, ironic, self-referential, and monologic on multiple levels, offers a distinct value judgment, one that gives readers the opportunity to reconsider what makes books – novels – 'useful,' or at least accessible, entertaining, or of any interest. While most readers would regard Alice's preference for novels with illustrations and dialogues between characters as a sign of her not-so-precocious intellect or as a preliminary example of her naïve response to the world she inhabits, Carroll's opening does challenge assumptions about literary aesthetics. Most readers, I think, at least to an extent, would agree with Alice: that "pictures and conversation" do make novels, well, more fun to read. Risking such a general claim about the novel form as a literary genre from the start, this paper proposes to investigate the function and effect of conversations inscribed into the works of two undisputed masters: Cervantes and Dickens.

I am interested in comparing the invented dialogues – conversations set off in inverted commas (quotation marks, in American English) – that contribute to the artistry, significance, and popularity of *Don Quixote* and *The Pickwick Papers.*[2] There are plenty of parallels between the two texts: both authors borrow

1 Carroll, Lewis (2003), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, ed. H. Haughton, London: Penguin, p. 9.

2 Critical approaches to Dickens's indebtedness to Cervantes range widely, and several comparisons between *Quixote* and *Pickwick* inform this paper. Most recently, Goetsch, Paul (2005), 'Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers and Don Quixote' Cervantes in the English Speaking World,* ed. D. Fernández-Morera / M. Hanke, Kassel: Reichenberger, pp. 143 – 57 sees *Don Quixote* as not so much a "concrete source for characters and episodes of Dickens's novel than a general model," but cedes that both protagonists are "admirable" because of the "values they so ridiculously" represent. Easson, Angus (2002), 'Don Pickwick: Dickens and the Transformation of Cervantes' *Rereading Victorian Fiction*, ed. A. Jenkins / J. John, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 173 – 88 argues that Dickens read *Don Quixote* set against an English picaresque tradition, transforming Pickwick from a "figure of fun" to an idealist. Others, like Potau, Mercedes (1993), 'Notes on Parallels between *The Pickwick Papers* and *Don Quixote*' *Dickens Quarterly* 10, pp. 105 – 10 and Vazquez de Prado Merino, María Teresa (2007), 'Ecos

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from contemporary drama, with farcical episodes (for example, mistaken identities at inns), parody literary language, and layer narratives one on top of the other, including interpolated tales that uneasily contrast with and inform the narrative itself. Two authors, in their first novels, whose foremost intent is to entertain their readers, inevitably engage in representing through conversations human behaviour and contemporary social realities, rife with economic disparities and class divisions. Confronted with or by social injustices, both Quixote and Pickwick judge, intervene, and impose their ethical codes: for Quixote, his mad commitment to knightly ideals (Cervantes makes no bones about Quixote being mad, driven insane by chivalric romances); for Pickwick, what Alexander Welsh identifies as his gentlemanly "principles."[3] The individuals they speak to often do not abide by the same rules, or, more disturbingly, only pretend to as soon as they suss out the situation. The result often leads to confusion, humiliation, or even physical pain for the protagonist, which both texts cast as something laughable, often through in-text audiences of onlookers, whose hilarity signals that the reader should not take the matter too seriously. At other times, dialogue simply breaks down: characters are in conversation with each other, but meanings are misunderstood which, in turn, is also represented as comical.

The word 'dialogue,' of course, invokes what Bakhtin identifies as the novel's defining generic features: heteroglossia, the orchestration of multiple voices and levels of discourse as well as the novel's familiarisation, making familiar and exposing through parody the epic, the sacred, the authoritative.[4] Bakhtin recognises both Cervantes and Dickens as exemplary authors in his study of the novel and the dialogic potential of its discourse. Nonetheless, along with the Bakhtinian 'dialogic' nature of comic novels come more obvious effects of conversations. To start with, there is the fact – and I think it is a fact – that short paragraphs are apparently easier to read than long ones: the periodical press, the advertising industry, SMS text messages, and Twitter would have us believe this to be the case (the complexity, though, of short texts and their contexts offers arguments otherwise, of course). Conversations in novels are part of a narrative strategy: how to advance plot, create interest, define character, represent reality, show and not just tell. Everyday speech, with its clichés and banalities, folk wisdom, unintended ideological assumptions, goes into print and is endowed

del Quijote en Charles Dickens' *La huella de Cervantes y del Quijote*, ed. J.M. Barrio / M. J. Crespo Allué, Valladolid: U Valladolid P, pp. 197 – 208 have noted echoes of Cervantes in Dickens's work and parallels between the two novels.

3 Welsh, Alexander (1967), 'Waverley, Pickwick and Don Quixote' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 22, pp. 19 – 30, pp. 28 – 9.

4 Bakhtin, M. Mikhail (1981), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. M. Holquist, Austin / TX: U of Austin P, pp. 411 – 413.

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with literariness. Conversations link novels to dramatic discourse, its conventions, its technique of exposition, its degrees of verisimilitude: both Cervantes and Dickens, thoroughly versed in the theatrical conventions of their respective times, trust that their readers are familiar with them as well, recognise their artificiality, and respond to their effects. Conversations – dialogue – even align novels with the Socratic Method, philosophical exchanges that construct meaning and that lead to new knowledge. And conversations, too, create relationships: performative utterances link individuals to each other, assert social status, and, when set down in writing, preserve these relationships and make them accessible to readers.

Cervantes turns to dialogue in the very prologue of *Don Quixote*. After directly addressing his "idle reader,"[5] he reports a conversation between himself as an author struggling to write a prologue and a lively, clever friend who helps him come up with a solution: just follow the conventions of other prologues – indeed, parody them. Dickens opens *Pickwick* with the Pickwick Club's transactions, which, within a few pages, fail to sustain the formality of its discourse as it reports what actually was said during the heated proceedings. Be it the famous auto-de-fé of romance literature in Chapter VI of *Don Quixote*, played out through the conversation between the priest and the barber[6] or Jingle's "volubility,"[7] his strings of broken sentences, punctuated only by dashes,[8] much of the brilliance of both novels rests in what the two respective narrators cede to their imagined characters' direct discourse.

John Forster noted that "Sam Weller and Mr. Pickwick are the Sancho and the Quixote of Londoners,"[9] and the comic verbal interchange between master and servant is clearly the most important feature shared by the two works. The similarities between the two pairs abound: Sancho, the gullible peasant with a healthy appetite and a tendency towards *dichos*, Sam Weller, the street-smart cockney boots with *wellerisms* among the most noted of his idiosyncratic patterns of speech. Both Sancho and Sam go into service for material gain: Sancho

5 Cervantes, Miguel de (1981), *Don Quixote: The Ormsby Translation, Revised; Backgrounds and Sources; Criticism*, ed. J.R. Jones / K. Douglas, New York / London: Norton, p. 9. All references are to this edition.

6 By criticising, indeed condemning to flames, literary rivals (and praising of himself) through the voices of characters within his text, Cervantes playfully asserts his position, while distancing himself. Writers can imagine characters saying things – indeed, saying things they themselves would like to say – and thus need not say such things themselves.

7 Dickens, Charles (1948), *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, Oxford / New York / Toronto / Melbourne: Oxford UP, p. 9.

8 It is among Jingle's early speeches that we get Dickens's most extensive reference to Spain and Spanish literary tradition, as he figures himself as a Don Juan through a micro-narrative that evokes the clichés of Spanish beauties, impulsive passion, and amorous conquests, made ridiculous by silly names and the introduction of a stomach pump.

9 Cited in Welsch (1967), p. 19.

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absurdly tempted by the promise of an island to govern; Sam, by a better "situation" – "a change of air, plenty to see, and little to do" (p. 156). Both Sancho and Sam, for other examples, entertain their respective masters by telling stories; both are silenced at times – "Sam, […] [h]ave the goodness to reserve your anecdotes till they are called for" (p. 256). Both serve as sounding boards, sidekicks, fellow sufferers and partners in crime; both servants humour and mirror their masters; both laugh at their master's expense, commiserate with their sufferings, and demonstrate loyalty to them to the end.

But just as Pickwick's physical appearance – rotund and often red in the face, sporting tights and gaiters – is the inverse of Quixote's tall, lanky frame, outrageously encased in an antique coat of armour, the conversations between master and servant define two different relationships and lead to different effects. Gullible and ignorant, Sancho repeatedly misunderstands his master as well as purposefully and playfully misinterprets him. His assertion that windmills are windmills offers an alternative perspective, an ineffective reality check, aligning him with both the narrator and the reader as Quixote madly transforms the countryside into chivalric landscape. Erich Auerbach and Salvador de Madariaga, most famously, discuss how Sancho learns to imitate his master's imitation of chivalric ideals; how a peasant, initially portrayed as illiterate, cowardly, and coarse, embraces noble ideals, exhibits keen insight into human nature, and blurs the line between imagination and reality in a way that rivals his master. Sam, on the other hand, is knowing from the start – a "wag" – who is engaged precisely because Pickwick recognises his astuteness: he tells Mrs. Bardell that Sam could teach her son "more tricks in a week than he could learn in a year" (p. 152). Pickwick, whether due to or in spite of his social class and gentlemanly principles, is portrayed as naïve – "Lord bless your heart, sir […] why where was you half baptised?" (p. 166) – and Sam participates in providing new perspectives and scenes to him, introducing his own anecdotes, which grant Pickwick insights into social realities and human motivation that he struggles to understand at times.

Thus, the parallel master/servant relationship is in a way inverted: Quixote is intent on teaching an ignorant Sancho, while Pickwick hires Sam because he recognises that Sam is smart from the start and, later, will benefit from Sam's worldly wisdom. This inversion stems from the imagined identity and motivation of the heroes themselves: Quixote relentlessly models his own actions on knightly romances which require constant explanation to Sancho. There are chapters dedicated solely to 'discourses,' conversations between the knight and his squire, as well as general monologues, when articulated by a mad *hidalgo*, are undermined and become subject to scrutiny. Quixote endlessly instructs Sancho chivalric conventions and courtly manners, for example in Part II, as Sancho prepares for his governorship:

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> 'Take care, Sancho, not to chew with both cheeks full, and not to eruct in anybody's presence.' 'Eruct?' said Sancho. 'I don't know what that means.'
> '*To eruct*, Sancho,' said Don Quixote, 'means *to belch*, and that is one of the vulgarest words in the Spanish language, though a very expressive one; and therefore polite persons have had recourse to the Latin, and instead of *belch* say *eruct*, and instead of *belches* say *eructations.* And if some do not understand these terms it matters little, for custom will bring them into use in the course of time, so that they will be readily understood. This is the way a language is enriched; custom and the public are all powerful there.'
> 'In truth, señor,' said Sancho, 'one of the counsels and cautions I intend to bear in mind will be not to belch, for I am constantly doing it.'
> '*Eruct*, Sancho, not *belch*,' said Don Quixote.
> 'Eruct. I'll say it from now on, and I swear not to forget it,' said Sancho. (p. 658)

Sancho is eminently teachable – his swearing demonstrates that he gets the main point, but is oblivious to semantic nuances. His coarseness contrasts with Quixote's respectability and respectable discourse, but it also drives Quixote to repeat the word 'belch,' to use the same discourse that Sancho does. Cervantes delights in depicting Sancho's receptiveness, recalcitrance, incredulity, and resilience as he aligns his pragmatic awareness of his surroundings with Quixote's lofty rhetoric and mad actions.

Pickwick, who, at the end of the novel, we find out, has purposefully sought to mix "with different varieties and shades of human character" (p. 796), turns to Sam for advice or willingly receives it:

> 'Now, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'the first thing to be done is to –'
> 'Order dinner, sir,' interposed Mr. Weller. 'It's wery late, sir.' (p. 211)

He has little to teach his servant, but much to gain, as their conversations repeatedly show. It is Sam who pulls Pickwick away from Dodson and Fogg before he gets further enmeshed in the law: "Battledore and shuttlecock's a wery good game, vhen you ain't the shuttlecock and two lawyers the battledores" (p. 269). It is Sam who teaches Pickwick:

> 'It's a wery remarkable circumstance, sir,' said Sam, 'that poverty and oysters always seem to go together.'
> 'I don't understand you, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.
> 'What I mean, sir,' said Sam, 'is that the poorer a place is, the greater call there seems to be for oysters. Look here, sir; here's a oyster stall to every half-dozen houses. The streets lined with 'em. Blessed if I don't think that ven a man's wery poor, he rushes out of his lodgings, and eats oysters in reg'lar desperation.'
> 'To be sure he does,' said Mr. Weller senior, 'and it's just the same with pickled salmon!'
> 'Those are two very remarkable facts, which never occurred to me before,' said Pickwick. 'The very first place we stop at, I'll make a note of them.' (pp. 301 – 02)

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Pickwick too is teachable: his impulse to record interesting information for himself and the club makes him especially responsive to Sam's unsolicited observations, wellerisms included. Pickwick's indiscriminate curiosity positions him as a potential audience for Sam, who delights in exercising linguistic dexterity as he enlightens so scrupulous a pupil.

While the conversations between each novel's pair, thus, develop two different relationships, their resemblance is apparent: in both novels, the discourse leads to an intimacy, the devotion of the servant to the master and of the master to the servant. Sancho comes to know his master's foibles, as does Sam his. There are mutual confidences – for example, when Quixote says to Sancho: "as you would have us believe what you saw in heaven, I require you to believe me as to what I saw in the cave of Montesinos. I say no more" (p. 653); or, after Pickwick's escape from accidentally entering Miss Witherfield's room in the Great White Horse inn: "'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, as he got into bed, 'I have made one of the most extraordinary mistakes to-night, that ever were heard of'" (p. 312). Quixote cannot help laughing at his squire's simplicity; similarly, Sancho breaks into laughter at his master's expense. Pickwick, too, is amused by Sam, and with Sam is able to laugh at himself as he extricates himself from one ridiculous situation to the next – the most notable when Pickwick joins Wardle in laughter after his rescue from the pound. This communion, through self-deprecation, through laughing at one's own humiliation, crosses class boundaries: it offers a democratic image of shared humanity as both authors depict their respective societies. Both comic pairs, however, reinforce assumptions about social class. Even when Quixote ostentatiously invites Sancho to eat by his side during their meal with the goatherds, pointing out how like love knight errantry "levels all" (p. 74), he simultaneously asserts his superiority. Sam, though his father bestows upon him enough capital to rise into middle-class matrimony, insists on remaining a servant.

Subversive intentions aside, both authors projected works that enable them to explore and represent through fiction the expanse of their respective societies. Dickens shares with Cervantes – or discovered early on in the composition of *Pickwick*, just as Cervantes did in *Don Quixote* – a narrative structure that provides the opportunity to record and exploit what happens when people who do not ordinarily speak to each other do. Cervantes makes clear from the start how ineffectual his protagonist's chivalric interventions are in the face of contemporary social conditions through Quixote's conversations with others. His very first action as a freshly dubbed knight is his rescue of the fifteen-year-old shepherd, Andrés, who is being flogged by his master, Juan Haduldo. The knight's interrogation into the details that have led to this violent scene illustrates Cervantes's representation of Quixote's brilliant confusion of the ideal with the real; it also exemplifies his failure to recognise sarcasm or even to listen

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to the words of others – conversation characterised by miscommunication. The knight immediately sides with the youth, placing unqualified reliance on the servant's word against his master's, and enters into a ludicrously detailed negotiation over the wages to be paid both as compensation for the beating and for labour. Quixote, however, also places trust in Haduldo's word, which, as the master shifts the mode of discourse to irony, promising to pay *real* for *real* what he "owes" (p. 41) Andrés, irony to which Quixote is utterly oblivious. Indeed, the episode shows how language can be wilfully misappropriated: Haduldo shifting to a figurative use of *real*, the idealistic knight maintaining the literal.

Cervantes repeatedly exploits to comic effect situations of this kind, where Quixote not only fails to perceive 'real' situations due to his madness, but misinterprets utterances of others. His speech and behaviour is based on a chivalric code (Girard's triangulated desire is at work here[10]); that of individuals he encounters, firmly grounded in the contemporary social conditions, where economic exchanges both establish relationships and serve as the mode of retribution when wrongs are to be redressed. At the close of the episode, Cervantes couples his own satirical comment, "Thus did the valiant Don Quixote right that wrong" (p. 41), with Quixote's imagining his own narrative, which records how he righted "the greatest wrong and grievance that ever injustice conceived and cruelty perpetrated: who hath today plucked the rod from the hand of yonder ruthless oppressor so wantonly lashing that tender child" (p. 42). This ironic insistence on one hand relies on and on another dismisses the mundane details surrounding wages, whippings, and the cost of shoes previously exchanged, as the narrative makes explicit that the knight's championing of a "tender child" only makes matters worse.

It is not just that knightly ideals are rendered absurd when set in the context of a labour dispute among peasants and that these same ideals exacerbate the situation. After all, the infuriated *labrador* is potentially justified in his anger at Andrés, who may have been remiss in watching the flock; Haduldo's class consciousness requires him to restrain his emotions and actions when confronted by the lower gentry and thus leads to his becoming sarcastic and only more brutal when left to his own devices. Rather, this early scene sets a fictional figure in the midst of an imbalance of power one encounters in everyday life (age, strength, authority, and economic status, to name a few). It raises the question of whether an objective third-party observer – be it a chivalric knight or anyone, for that matter – is in the position to intervene, arbitrate, let alone right wrongs based on reported evidence. While Cervantes's irony is part of the novel's project to expose the absurdity of chivalric romances, it also approaches a proto-

10 Girard, René (1965), *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, pp. 1 – 52.

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Hobbesian perspective into human nature and pessimistically dismisses the question of justice altogether.

Towards the end of Part I, Andrés reappears. Quixote is surrounded at this time by his aristocratic companions, who step out of the interpolated tales and are now playing along with Quixote's lunacy to ensure his safe delivery back to his village in La Mancha. Quixote retells the episode to his companions, with accuracy and pride, as evidence of the value of knights-errant in the modern world. He is at first chagrined and then outraged when Andrés counters his version with the outcome of the intervention: "as soon as your worship had left the wood and we were alone," explains Andrés:

> 'he tied me up again to the same oak and gave me a fresh flogging, until I looked like Saint Bartholomew. With every stroke he gave me, he followed up with some jest or gibe about having made a fool of your worship, and if it hadn't been for the pain I was suffering, I would have laughed at the things he said.' (p. 242)

Invoking the patron saint of shoemakers (in reference to the squabble over the price of Andrés' new shoes and potentially the bloody massacre to the north in France), Andrés ends by cursing Quixote to his face:

> 'For the love of God, sir knight-errant, if you ever meet me again, though you may see them cutting me to pieces, give me no aid, but leave me to my misfortune. It will not be so great that a greater will not come to me by being helped by your worship, on whom and all the knights-errant that have ever been born God send his curse.' (pp. 243 – 44)

The gentlefolk, observing the scene need to restrain their laughter: humiliated, openly mocked, forced to see lucidly that his albeit mad assumptions about the effect of his actions are false, Quixote is infuriated, but silenced, and the chapter closes uncomfortably.

A Victorian reader or a twenty-first-century one, both of whose responses to Quixote are shaped by centuries of readings and revisions, may be taken aback by the gentlefolk's need to restrain their laughter: the in-text audience's lack of compassion towards Quixote's madness is dismissive, complicit with Cervantes's project to expose the absurdity of their popular fictional genre. There is no textual evidence that this audience of gentlefolk even acknowledge Andrés's sorry condition: the narrator reports that the youth is basically a vagrant, begging his way to Seville. Sancho shows some compassion, offering Andrés a piece of cheese and bread, a gesture that demonstrates class solidarity, in a remarkable way. The whole situation may have arisen from Quixote crossing class boundaries, interfering in a labour dispute. This charity on Sancho's part also demonstrates his sympathy for someone who suffers as the result of his master's actions (as he has – this episode takes place post-blanket tossing); the gesture is even a greater, taking into account the value Sancho places on food. Sancho himself is given pause, though, when Andrés seems to be waiting for

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more. The youth lingers, and "seeing that nobody gave him anything more" (p. 243) he lashes out with his curse, which in turn incites Quixote's wrath.

If, as Angus Easson argues, Dickens read *Don Quixote* "through and through,"[11] it is hard for me to imagine his response to this episode. Its importance within the narrative trajectory of Part I of *Don Quixote* is obvious, as it breaks away from the episodic nature of the plot; Dickens is a master of plotting surprise reunions in his novels, having characters reappear on the scene (Jingle, for example) to hit home a particular message or continue interaction with the hero.[12] The reappearance of Andrés – a youth who does not overcome vicissitudes, who does not resort to his own resources or wit in the face of adversity, who lacks resilience, who has no champion – and the in-text audience's lack of compassion for his suffering seem in direct opposition to Dickens's championing of suffering children. From whatever source we attribute Dickens special empathy for children (his own childhood experiences, Wordsworthian intimations of immortality, keen awareness of miserable social conditions), his sense of outrage at the victimisation of helpless children plays itself out in the uneven matches between them and the brutal, sarcastic or simply unfeeling adults who terrorise them in his novels. The first of these suffering children is of course Oliver Twist (whose earliest notable action, like the last of Andrés, is to ask for 'more'), but *Pickwick* is distinguished among Dickens novels by *not* championing children. Instead, readers are introduced to children like Joe, the fat boy, or Master Tommy Bardell, whose function is to take part in the comic action of the various scenes in which they appear. Even the poor boy who gets "rapped […] over the head with his lantern five or six times" (p. 397) by Gabriel Grub seems to be the vehicle for dark comedy, not an appeal to prevent such physical abuse. Pickwick's benevolence does lead him to express concern for children during one minor episode, which takes place amidst the bucolic pleasures of Dingly Dell. He is taken aback, when "two ragged boys who had been marshalled to the spot" perch themselves in the trees:

> 'What are these lads for?' inquired Mr. Pickwick abruptly. He was rather alarmed; for he was not quite certain but that the distress of the agricultural interest, about which he had often heard a great deal, might have compelled the small boys attached to the soil to earn a precarious and hazardous subsistence by making marks of themselves for inexperienced sportsmen.
> 'Only to start the game,' replied Mr. Wardle.

11 Easson, Angus (2002), pp. 173 – 88, p. 174.

12 It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the structural similarities in the plots of *Don Quixote* and *Pickwick*, but both narratives build off a premise (a madman acting out acts of chivalry; a benevolent gentleman pursuing 'investigations'), begin episodically, include interpolated stories, and eventually experiment with contrapuntal interweaving of multiple narratives.

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'To what?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.
'Why, in plain English, to frighten the rooks.'
'Oh! is that all?
'You are satisfied?'
'Quite.' (p. 84)

Relieved that those "attached to the soil" are not driven by desperation to risk their lives to support leisure class pleasures, Pickwick's momentary shock is allayed. The misunderstanding, extended further by the pun on "starting the game," prompts his initial consternation over the sorry state of human nature. I would argue that the phrase "the distress of the agricultural interest" does show that Pickwick is not completely unaware of social realities in the midst of all the Pickwickian pleasure. Fair enough, the passage may suggest a nostalgia for an agrarian past, when children of tenants are at the beck and call of the lord of the manor (and no doubt enjoy climbing trees), but the boys' "ragged" condition suggests exploitation, and, as readers are soon to find out, they remain in considerable danger, especially taking into account Winkle's incompetence as a marksman. Like Quixote, Pickwick, in spite of his good nature and his good will, is not particularly effective in championing the underprivileged.

Both novelists take crossing class boundaries to an extreme, offering the opportunities for the protagonists to encounter, speak with, and attempt to help the most disenfranchised in their respective societies. Quixote's interchange with the galley slaves illustrates the knight's indiscriminate quest "to put down force and to succour and help the wretched" (p. 151); it also enables Cervantes to set Quixote's absurd idealism against social realities that lead to conditions utterly incompatible with chivalric codes. The cynical guard warns Quixote how the prisoners "enjoy dirty tricks and talking about them" (p. 152), suggesting something distinct about criminal discourse from the start, which turns out to be prisoner slang: in response to Quixote's queries into the cause of their plight, the galley slaves respond with euphemisms – for being a lover, a canary, a musician – which Quixote first takes literarily, until they decode their encrypted single-word responses into layman's terms. For example, in response to the first convict's reply that his misfortune results from his being a lover, Quixote replies: "For that only? […] why, if for being lovers they send people to the galleys I might have been rowing in them long ago" (p. 152).

'The love is not the sort your worship is thinking of […], mine was that I loved a washerwoman's basket of clean linen so well, and held it so close in my embrace, that if the arm of the law had not forced it from me, I should never have let it go of my own will to this moment; I was caught in the act, there was no occasion for torture, the case was settled, they treated me to a hundred lashes on the back, and three years of gurapas besides, and that was the end of it.' (p. 152)

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Not only does the novel give voice to socially marginalised criminals, but it grants them wit as well, infusing wretchedness and human misery with the comic. In chains, the men have the liberty to express themselves. Most outrageous is how the interchange culminates with Gines de Pasamonte's defiance, who refers Quixote to his unfinished, but already published autobiography, a work that contains "facts so neat and amusing that no lies could match them" (p. 156). A rival to the romantic texts that Quixote reveres is the picaresque, the racy narratives that anticipate the Newgate novel; Cervantes places his parody of a knight face to face with a figure who in turn has stepped out of the pages of the alternative, competing narrative genre, further complicating Cervantes's and Quixote's blurring of the line between reality and fiction. When Quixote, disregarding their confessions, demands the prisoners' release, the consequence is disastrous: the newly freed galley slaves shower him with stones. The real danger of Quixote's situation – the risk of being apprehended by the Holy Brotherhood for breaking the law – compels him to follow Sancho's advice and compromise his principles, seeking refuge in the Sierra Morena.

Pickwick's embroilment with the law and eventual incarceration in the Fleet for his principles, though an imperfect parallel, offers Dickens a similar opportunity: to set his protagonist among social outcasts, in this case prisoners for debt, an experience which ultimately sates his desire to 'mix' with society. Here, as Pickwick gets to know the situation, he misconstrues his surroundings:

> '[…] and those, I suppose, are the little cellars where the prisoners keep their small quantities of coals. Unpleasant places to have to go down to; but very convenient, I dare say.'
> 'Yes, I shouldn't wonder if they was convenient,' replied the gentleman, 'seeing that a few people live there, pretty snug. That's the Fair, that is.'
> 'My friend,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'you don't really mean to say that human beings live down in those wretched dungeons.' (p. 573)

Dickens presents to his reader and Pickwick similarly sarcastic euphemisms – prison slang – and places Pickwick in situations that compromise his principles, paralleling, perhaps, the chaos that ensues after the release of galley slaves: the nightmarish first night Pickwick experience in the warden's room culminates in the Zephyr's confiscating his nightcap and Pickwick's resorting to violence (p. 582). The scene is an initiation into the company of prisoners and an alternative set of values: "Well, you're a trump; I like you the better for it" (p. 582). Ultimately, Pickwick's jail experience and foray into the society of inmates quench his thirst for curiosity: he shuts himself up for "three long months," his health begins to suffer, his "inflexible resolution" (p. 645) separates him from human intercourse.

The episodes in the Fleet enable Pickwick to show his magnanimity to Jingle

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and Job Trotter; Sam, to show his loyalty to his master; and readers, to get a glimpse into human misery strikingly in contrast to the merriment and pleasure of Dingly Dell. As Pickwick leaves, he observes his fellow inmates: "In all the crowd of wan, emaciated faces, he saw not one which was not the happier for his sympathy and charity" (p. 666). His good nature and generosity is not enough to alleviate the general suffering of such figures:

> 'Poor fellow, poor fellow!' said Mr. Pickwick. 'God bless you, my friends!' As Mr. Pickwick uttered this adieu, the crowd raised a loud shout. Many among them were pressing forward to shake him by the hand, again, when he drew his arm through Perker's, and hurried from the prison: far more sad and melancholy, for the moment, than when he had first entered it. Alas! how many sad and unhappy beings had he left behind! (p. 667)

The parting blessing seems intent on demonstrating Pickwick's greatness of heart; the narrative, however, seems intent on returning its protagonist back to more pleasurable and humorous scenes, ending the chapter with Sam cracking a joke,

> 'I wish them horses had been three months and better in the Fleet, sir.' 'Why, Sam?' inquired Mr. Pickwick. 'Wy, sir,' exclaimed Mr. Weller, rubbing his hands, 'how they would go if they had been.' (p. 667)

Sam, like Sancho, is intent on getting his master as far away from his these social outcasts and their miserable condition as fast as he can.

Quixote's interviews with the galley slaves and Pickwick's incarceration in the Fleet demonstrate how both novels parody and provide insight into social institutions. Both seem especially interested in exposing, through satire, their corresponding systems of justice. In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes offers a complicated satire: the duke and duchess, as part of their overextended manipulations of Quixote and Sancho, establish Sancho as governor and thus justice of the peace on his 'island' of Barataria, where all of the inhabitants seem to be taking part in the practical joke. Still, the cases brought before him appear to be real ones involving village inhabitants. Utterly in contrast to chivalric ideals, in one, a woman demands "Justice, señor governor, justice!" and accuses a pig-dealer of rape. The accused defends himself, admitting to have "yoked" with the "good dame," but also to have paid her fairly, and accuses her of lying. Sancho decides the case through non-verbal evidence: he gets the two struggle over the purse, and the woman proves victorious: "Sister, if you had shown as much, or only half as much, spirit and vigor in defending your body as you have shown in defending that purse, the strength of Hercules could not have forced you" (p. 674). Sancho's cleverness fills the bystanders with "admiration at their new governor's judgments and sentences" (p. 674) – admittedly, not laughter, but an in-text audience guiding the reader's response. The case is not a clear one; the woman is

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banished, a sordid affair is exposed, and while the text implies that this poor woman is in the wrong, the justice of the case is dubious. The man did commit adultery, as did the woman. This real case of adultery is being tried before Sancho, who is only playing at being a governor, and while Cervantes suggests that shrewdness and common sense can discern right from wrong, the episode betrays mistrust in language: actions and behaviour are better evidence than verbal accounts when it comes to judging situations.

The Pickwick Papers provides Dickens with an early opportunity in a lifelong attack on the justice system. Though not in the seat of judgment, like Sancho, Sam Weller shines: he outwits the Serjeant Buzzfuzz and is able to get entered into the court record that Dodson and Fogg have "taken up the case on spec" (p. 485). He too caters to an in-text audience, which signals the reader's response. It is a stretch, but I hope not too far a one, to place Mrs. Bardell's behaviour against that of the woman sentenced by Sancho, who, after the fact, in an affair of honour, expects to get more out of the situation she finds herself in. In both, private affairs are displayed before the public – in the courtroom as well as the narrative; in both, honour is arbitrarily assigned an economic value; and in both there is ambiguity over who is in the right. The breach of promise suit, ultimately, is caused by Mrs. Bardell's misinterpretation Pickwick's announcement to engage a manservant and his own myopic missing of her repeated "La, Mr. Pickwick" and the "crimson rising to her cap-border" (p. 151). There is no ambiguity from Pickwick's perspective, and none from Mrs. Bardell's either, but humiliated, she starts the proceedings against Pickwick.

The Bardell vs. Pickwick episode results from miscommunication: a conversation where signals get crossed, meaning goes awry. Both novels – *Don Quixote* and *Pickwick* – share and derive energy as well as interest in misunderstandings, when dialogue breaks down and communication fails. Both authors represent individuals not being listened to, being misinterpreted; other individuals, lying outright; others, only playing at parts. The complexity of human relations, of human interactions, manifests itself in the conversations individuals have with each other; and whether it is intrinsic to the novel form – as Bakhtin would argue – or a strategy Dickens shares with, if not learned from, Cervantes, both authors permit their readers to make sense of and take pleasure in conversations that establish the relationships in and drive the action of their respective novels.

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Isabel Vila Cabanes (Jena)

2.5 Reading the Grotesque in the Works of Charles Dickens and Jonathan Swift

Thinking of the grotesque in British literature almost necessarily brings to mind the works of Swift and Dickens, and this is clearly shown by the fact that major analyses of this aesthetic mode such as Wolfgang Kayser's or Arthur Clayborough's often refer to these two brilliant writers in order to exemplify their argument. Indeed, the grotesque has such a paramount role in Dickens's works, with which we are concerned in this study, that it has been a recurrent topic in literary criticism. This holds true already for contemporaries of his such as Walter Bagehot, John Forster and shortly after his death G.K. Chesterton. However, even though Dickens and Swift have furnished literature with outstanding examples of the grotesque and it has been established that the Victorian writer was familiar with Swift, few critics have asked whether and to what extent the eighteenth-century satirist influenced the writings of Dickens. It is the aim of this paper to demonstrate that Dickens, as an avid reader of Swift, often draws inspiration from Swift in the many grotesque passages of his œuvre. In the following, I will start by providing a brief definition of those elements of the grotesque which Dickens and Swift share. Next, I will contextualise the grotesque in Dickens's works, giving special attention to the main literary sources from which Dickens's grotesque emerges. The main object of the paper will, then, be an examination of Dickens's relationship with Swift, by looking at instances of the grotesque in his works *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), *Oliver Twist* (1838), *American Notes* (1842), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843 – 4), and *Hard Times* (1854) which evince certain affinities with Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and 'A Modest Proposal' (1729).

1. Conceptualising the Grotesque

Despite the many attempts to conceptualise the grotesque in the context of literature and art during the past centuries, the term remains elusive and has, to date, escaped definite categorisation. The characterisation I propose is not

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meant to be comprehensive, but a working definition that covers those aspects of the term which are relevant for the analysis of Swift's and Dickens's use of the grotesque. I will focus on three aspects which I consider as constitutive elements of this aesthetic mode: the conflict of the comic and the fearful, the estrangement from the familiar world and the use of literary devices which help to create or highlight the grotesque image. The first two correspond to the reader's reaction, that is, the effect of the grotesque object on the reader, while the latter considers the grotesque from a formal perspective.

To explicate the first aspect, the experience of the grotesque is paradoxical, because it depends on an "unresolved conflict" between comic and repulsive elements.[1] Thus, the response towards the grotesque object is at the same time one of laughter and one of revulsion. Scholars have traditionally focused on either the disgusting or the ludicrous qualities of the grotesque, depending on which appears more prominently in the respective work. For instance, Kayser gives strong emphasis on the horrific character of the grotesque, while Thomas Wright is more concerned with the burlesque side of it. I would argue that the key to the grotesque is this very insoluble ambivalence and, therefore, that making a distinction between the comic and the terrifying neglects a quality that is essential to grotesque art.[2] Such a problematic approach has frequently been taken to Dickens's characters, which have often been classified as either comic or fearsome.[3] However, it is the very mixture of hilarity and repulsion that makes grotesque characters like Gradgrind or Mrs. Gamp successful. If Dickens offers excellent examples of the ambiguity of the grotesque in his characters, Swift skilfully captures this in the plot of 'A Modest Proposal.' By using an ironic persona and a humorous style in the presentation of the arguments, Swift manages to make the barbaric suggestion that eating the babies of impoverished Irish people would be a successful solution for their economic problem sound jocular.

Harpham argues that an object can be considered grotesque when it simultaneously provokes not only laughter and disgust or horror, but also astonish-

1 Thomson, Philip (1979), *The Grotesque*, London: Methuen, p. 20; cf. Steig, Michael (1970), 'Defining the Grotesque: An Attempt at Synthesis' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29, p. 260; Jennings, Lee Byron (1963), *The Ludicrous Demon: Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post-Romantic Prose*, Berkeley: U of California P, p. 10; Harpham, Geoffrey (1975 – 76), 'The Grotesque: First Principles' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34, pp. 464 – 5.

2 Rocadio, D.S. (1990), *The Comic, the Grotesque, and the Uncanny in Charles Dickens*, Norwich: U of East Anglia, unpublished thesis (Ph.D.), pp. 32 – 3.

3 Clayborough, Arthur (1965), *The Grotesque in English Literature*, Oxford: Clarendon P, pp. 201 – 22. He categorises Dickens's grotesque characters into "celestial creatures" and "evil villains."

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ment.[4] This brings us to the second aspect of the grotesque: that it creates a feeling of alienation from ordinary life. The grotesque object causes strong estrangement from the familiar, breaking with the expectations of the reader. However, the alienation is not absolute, and a connection with everyday reality remains so that the reader is not left with a sense of complete absurdity.[5] Santayana describes this defamiliarisation as an "interval," a pause that occurs when, despite having noticed the different elements which constitute the grotesque object, the reader cannot yet reconcile them and make complete sense of them.[6] Alienation from the familiar world is a basic strategy in both Dickens and Swift, who blend the extraordinary and the ordinary in their descriptions of grotesque characters and settings. In the words of Clayborough, "the world [Dickens] depicts is not merely an alien one […] but an alienated world."[7]

At a textual level, the grotesque is conveyed or emphasised by means of different aesthetic devices. Among the most frequent rhetorical figures that Dickens employs are:

1. Absolutes and hyperboles which highlight the excessive character of the image, such as the first description of Mr. Pecksniff, portrayed as a "moral man" whose "very throat is moral;" or the very first sentence of *Hard Times*, which sets the tone and topic of the novel from the start: "NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else" (*HT*, p. 1).[8]
2. Descriptions of disturbing images with a highly ironic tone recur in both Swift and Dickens:

> Sitting opposite to them was a gentleman in a high state of tobacco, who wore quite a little beard, composed of the overflowing of that weed, as they had dried about his mouth and chin; so common an ornament that it would scarcely have attracted Martin's observation, but that this good citizen, burning to assert his equality against all comers, sucked his knife for some moments, and made a cut with it at the butter, just as Martin was in the act of taking some. There was a juiciness about the deed that might have sickened a scavenger. (*MC*, p. 535)

4 Harpham (1975 – 6), p. 463; Steig (1970), p. 254.

5 Harpham (1975 – 6), p. 462. He argues that if this connection with the familiar world disappears, we cannot speak anymore of "truly grotesque," for it becomes absurd.

6 Santayana, George (2004), *The Sense of Beauty*, New York: Cosimo, p. 256; Harpham (2006), *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*, Colorado: Davies Group Publishing, pp. 18 – 9.

7 Clayborough (1965), pp. 250 – 1.

8 Quotations from Dickens's novels *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *American Notes*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and *Hard Times* are cited parenthetically in the text, abbreviated PP, OT, AN, MC, and HT respectively. Full references of the editions are listed in the bibliography.

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3. The speech of grotesque characters such as Pecksniff is often distinguished by circumlocutions and redundant phrases which draw attention to his eccentric personality. For example, Pecksniff is given to wordy and periphrastic expressions:

> 'Don't say WE get drunk, Pa,' urged the eldest Miss Pecksniff.
> 'When I say we, my dear,' returned her father, 'I mean mankind in general; the human race, considered as a body, and not as individuals. There is nothing personal in morality, my love. Even such a thing as this,' said Mr Pecksniff, laying the fore-finger of his left hand upon the brown paper patch on the top of his head, 'slight casual baldness though it be, reminds us that we are but'—he was going to say 'worms,' but recollecting that worms were not remarkable for heads of hair, he substituted 'flesh and blood.' (*MC*, p. 13)

4. Enumerations reinforce the exaggerated nature of the grotesque object. Dickens, in his descriptions of American feasts, often lists all the food items in the meal in order to stress its repulsive and animalistic character:

> broiled ham, sausages, veal cutlets, steaks, and such other viands of that nature as may be supposed, by a tolerably wide poetical construction, 'to fix' a chicken comfortably in the digestive organs of any lady or gentleman. (*AN*, p. 199)

> The poultry, which may perhaps be considered to have formed the staple of the entertainment—for there was a turkey at the top, a pair of ducks at the bottom, and two fowls in the middle—disappeared as rapidly as if every bird had had the use of its wings, and had flown in desperation down a human throat. The oysters, stewed and pickled, leaped from their capacious reservoirs, and slid by scores into the mouths of the assembly. The sharpest pickles vanished, whole cucumbers at once, like sugar-plums, and no man winked his eye. (*MC*, p. 271)

5. Humanising objects and dehumanising people are frequent aesthetic devices employed in creating grotesque images. To give an example, in *Hard Times*, "the multitude of Coketown" is "generically called 'the Hands,'" (*HT*, p. 83), the *pars-pro-toto* figure showing the heartless nature of industrialisation and the degradation to which workers are reduced. Correspondingly, there appear many animalisations, such as Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, whose physique is associated with reptiles, evincing the lack of human qualities and the evil nature of the character. As Dorothy Van Ghent claims in her detailed analysis of Dickens's world, these "grotesque transpositions are a coherent imagination of a reality that has lost coherence, comic because they form a pattern integrating the disintegrated and lying athwart the reality that has not got itself imagined."[9]

6. Grotesque characters and places are often given absurd names, a device particularly outstanding in Swift's works, which gives evidence of the intimate

9 Van Ghent, Dorothy (1950), 'The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's' *The Sewanee Review* 58, pp. 424 – 6.

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relationship between the grotesque and the absurd pointed out by theorists like Kayser or Thomson. We find names such as Pecksniff, Gradgrind or Coketown in Dickens or Laputa, Glubbdubdrib or Brobdingnag in Swift, showing the preposterous nature of the person or place they designate. According to Clayborough, Swift's penchant for extremely grotesque names is an "example of fantasy for its own sake – or more accurately, absurdity for its own sake." They are purposely bizarre and difficult to pronounce, creating a shock effect and stimulating the use of imagination.[10]

7. Finally, we also find aesthetic devices that suggest contrast such as oxymorons like "the Bully of humility" (*HT*, p. 18) or character foils like Bitzer and Sissy Jupe, which help to reinforce the opposition between two antithetical approaches to life, that is, facticity and fancy. Another figure of speech which may emphasise grotesque descriptions is alliteration, although this device is not particularly bound to the grotesque mode. However, with its repetitive devices the sentence "If the greedy little Gradgrinds grasped at more than this, what was it for good gracious goodness' sake, that the greedy little Gradgrinds grasped at?" (*HT*, p. 13), by emulating the twist in the nursery rhyme *Peter Piper*, accentuates the grotesqueness of a childhood deprived of imagination.

Before closing this brief characterisation of the grotesque, it is necessary to point out that, as Barasch or Harpham argue, the grotesque is a diachronic concept, and the response of the reader to the grotesque object is always determined by the specific historical and cultural background.[11] Our definition of what constitutes a grotesque representation lies in our "context of expectations,"[12] which changes through the ages. Once we see something as normal, the element of surprise is lost. So the perception of what qualifies as grotesque may be a function of cultural change.

2. The Grotesque in Dickens's Works

One of the most extensive books on our topic is Michael Hollington's *Dickens and the Grotesque*, a detailed study of the grotesque in all of Dickens's major books. Hollington observes that Dickens's grotesque representations correspond to Bakhtin's notion of "grotesque realism."[13] In his discussion of Rabelais, Bakhtin explains that

10 Clayborough (1965), p. 132.

11 Barasch, Frances (1985), 'The Grotesque as a Comic Genre' *Modern Language Studies* 15, p. 4.

12 Harpham (1975 – 6), p. 462.

13 Hollington, Michael (1984), *Dickens and the Grotesque,* London: Croom Helm, pp. 5 – 6.

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> The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.[14]

Degradation, hyperbolism, and emphasis on an unfinished body are typical images of grotesque realism. The 'grotesque body' is perceived as limitless and open, and orifices and protuberances play a major part in its representation. Bakhtin understands the 'grotesque body' not as an individual entity but as symbolic of the external world, always open to expand and blend with its exterior. The representation of bodily functions, birth or old age is also typical of grotesque realism. Exaggerated images are common not only in Dickens's, but also in Swift's works. To give an example, according to Robert Lougy, the American body in *Martin Chuzzlewit* is often presented as the 'grotesque body,' and he argues that the American habit of tobacco-chewing and spitting has a similar role to defecating in Swift.[15]

Dickens is especially well-known for individual grotesque characters, such as Fagin, Mrs. Gamp, Pecksniff, Gradgrind or Quilp, but the grotesque also permeates the world in which these characters live. Scholars like Steig or Dunn have argued that Dickens's use of the grotesque emerges throughout his works. They maintain that Dickens goes from individual grotesque characters like Fagin to a more dominant presence of grotesque elements in the social environment of the whole novel, as in *Hard Times* or *Bleak House*. If this development really exists, it is plausible to consider the possibility, as Rocadio points out, that this change may also be a reflection of Dickens's later growing interest in Victorian society as a whole.[16]

Hollington traces Dickens's grotesque back to three major sources: popular theatre and the *commedia dell'arte*, visual satire and its relation to literary tradition.[17] It is the latter that is of particular interest for the purpose of this paper. Among the many artists that have influenced Dickens's use of the grotesque are Cervantes, Sterne, Voltaire, Coleridge, Smollett, and, of course, Swift. However, Hollington notes that Dickens's perception of grotesque art is particularly connected to German Romanticism. Certainly, Dickens's approach to the grotesque can be related to the call for the use of imagination against a more realistic vision of the world. In this context, it would be difficult to establish a connection between Dickens's and Swift's use of the grotesque, since the latter belongs to the Enlightenment period, usually characterised by the use of reason

14 Bakhtin, Mikhail (1984), *Rabelais and his World*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, pp. 19 – 20.
15 Lougy, Robert (1994), 'Desire and the Ideology of Violence: America in Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*' *Criticism* 36, pp. 380 – 1.
16 Rocadio (1990), p. 31.
17 Hollington (1984), p. 8.

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and science. Yet Swift's work is far from restricting itself to everyday reality. As Hollington states, the Romantic Schlegel finds in Swift and Sterne an exception to the realist novel of the eighteenth century, claiming that their grotesque descriptions bring them closer to the spirit of the Romantic epoch.[18] Therefore, it could be argued that both Dickens's and Swift's unconstrained use of imagination in their grotesque moments sets them apart from their respective contemporaries and is in line with the Romantic approach to the grotesque. Albeit the many existing differences between both writers, a detailed study of the literary sources of Dickens and the grotesque should also consider the extent to which Swift has influenced his use of this aesthetic mode, which, as I will show in the following, proves to be deeper than one may think at first sight.

3. Dickens as an Avid Reader of Swift

It comes as something of a surprise that, despite the large number of studies of Dickens's sources as a writer and the well-known fact that he had in his library five different editions of *Gulliver's Travels* and two complete collections of Swift's work,[19] only few scholars have addressed this topic in detail. An exception is, for instance, Steig, who, in 'Dickens' Excremental Vision,' shows a direct connection between Swift's "excremental vision" and Dickens's novel *Bleak House*. However, the impact of Swift's texts on Dickens is manifest in the countless explicit and implicit allusions to the eighteenth-century satirist throughout his œuvre.[20]

As Harry Stone points out in *The Night Side of Dickens*, the writer had been familiar with Swift's works already as a child and he often reread them as an adult, remarking that in a letter which Dickens wrote to Forster in 1841 he tells that he had spent the day looking into Swift's books.[21] As a matter of fact, Swiftian references appear again and again not only in Dickens's professional writings, but also in his personal correspondence. He brings up the absent-minded intellectuals of Laputa who needed to be poked with flappers in order to jog their memories in a letter to John Kenyon in 1854: "I had dim misgivings on the subject when your note arrived while I was dressing this morning, and so did

18 Hollington (1984), p. 18.

19 Stone, Harry (1994), *The Night Side of Dickens: Cannibalism, Passion, Necessity*, Columbus: Ohio State UP, pp. 557 – 8.

20 Apart from the novels discussed in this paper, there are explicit references to Swift and his works in Dickens's *Sketches by Boz*, *Pictures from Italy*, *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices, Our Mutual Friend*, and *The Uncommercial Traveller.*

21 "I have done nothing today but cut the *Swift*, looking into it with a delicious laziness in all manner of delightful places." Letter to John Forster, 18 March 1841, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 2, ed. Madeline House (1994), Oxford: Clarendon P, p. 238; Stone (1994), p. 558 dates this letter back to 1844.

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not answer it until my two flappers were up."[22] Likewise, Dickens borrows once again Swift's words when writing to Frank Stone in 1839 to confirm whether he is right in assuming that Stone needs two tickets for the Macready Dinner. Instead of simply asking if he is wrong, Dickens quotes the euphemism employed by the Houyhnhnms in order to express falsehood, since they are such a high race that they do not own a word for lying in their language: "The Stewards' accounts for the Macready Dinner are in course of settlement. Am I correct in having you down for two tickets, or am I thinking the thing which is not?"[23] To quote a last example, he also paraphrases Swift's *Thoughts on Various Subjects* (1706) in the Preface to the Cheap Edition of *The Pickwick Papers* (1847) in order to portray the hypocrisy of reverends like Mr. Stiggins, who "in the words of SWIFT, have just enough religion to make them hate, and not enough to make them love, one another" (*PP*, p. 762).[24]

4. References to Swift in Dickens's Grotesque Passages

It is particularly *Gulliver's Travels* and 'A Modest Proposal' that made a major impact on Dickens's presentation of the grotesque. Not only does Dickens mention Lilliput, Brobdingnag, the country of the Houyhnhnms or makes jokes about eating babies, but, as Stone observes, he borrows Swift's rhetorical devices in 'A Modest Proposal' as well as inspiration for the titles in pieces presenting contentious issues such as 'Proposals for a National Jest-Book' (*Household Words*, 1853) 'Proposals for Amusing Posterity' (*Household Words*, 1856), or 'Five New Points of Criminal Law' (*All the Year Round*, 1859).[25] In these short essays, just as in 'A Modest Proposal,' there are plenty of persuasive strategies such as manipulation of the terminology of economic treaties or the use of a serious persona which underline the absurdity of the proposal. In the following, I will focus on two representative categories of the influence of Swift in Dickens's grotesque, namely, gruesome eating and "cannibal jokes" on the one hand, and "absurd logic" on the other. Scholars have characterised Dickens's fascination

22 Letter to John Kenyon, 1 March 1854, ed. House, vol. 7 (1997), p. 282.

23 Letter to Frank Stone, 27 July 1839, ed. House, vol. 1 (1988), p. 572. See also the editor's footnote to the letter in the same page. The Houyhnhnm's answer to Gulliver in Swift's novel is "that I must needs be mistaken, or that I *said the thing which was not*." Swift, Jonathan (2008), *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Claude Rawson, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 219.

24 Glancy, Ruth (1999), *Student Companion to Charles Dickens,* Westport / CON: Greenwood P, p. 29. Swift's original words are: "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another."

25 Stone (1994), p. 557.

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with the grotesque as "the attraction of repulsion,"[26] a term which may also be applied to many of Swift's satires. Dickens skilfully masters the art of creating images which are simultaneously gruesome and fascinating. This occurs most notably in his representation of grotesque eating manners, at times on the borderline of cannibalism and often recalling the grotesque imagery of Swift.

Bakhtin tends to connect banquet images and food consumption with the grotesque body.[27] Enumerations of food are very common in *American Notes*, showing the voraciousness of American people. Indeed, one of the fiercest criticisms of Americans in Dickens's writings concerns their rough eating practices. For that matter he strongly disapproves of their "custom of hastily swallowing large quantities of animal food, three times a-day, and rushing back to sedentary pursuits after each meal" (*AN*, p. 274). The description of festive and enjoyable meals of the gentlemen of the Pickwick Club blatantly contrasts with his portrayal of American manners. Norbert Lennartz observes that despite the Victorian tradition of non-consumption and scarcity supported by treatises like Malthus's, nineteenth-century naturalist fiction offers numerous representations of "bestial eating habits."[28] "Dickens", Lennartz says, "contrasts British polite manners at the table with the animalistic way of ingesting food in the 'New World' by comparing Americans to the Yahoos, those quasi-human grotesque creatures that feed themselves like beasts:"[29]

> sitting down with so many fellow-animals to ward off thirst and hunger as a business; to empty, each creature, his Yahoo's trough as quickly as he can, and then slink sullenly away; to have these social sacraments stripped of everything but the mere greedy satisfaction of the natural cravings; goes so against the grain with me, that I seriously believe the recollection of these funeral feasts will be a waking nightmare to me all my life. (*AN*, p. 189)

The Yahoos' greedy and copious feeding directed towards the "mere satisfaction of the natural cravings," which disturbs Gulliver so deeply, parallels the lifelong impression that Americans' gluttony and savage eating manners make on Dickens, since "these funeral feasts" seem to turn into a "waking nightmare" that will haunt the writer forever.

Dickens's proclivity for black humour in connection with eating is reflected, as Hollington notes, in the several "cannibal jokes" which appear in *The Pick-*

26 Hollington (1984), p. 24. The expression originally appears in Dickens's essay 'City of the Absent' in the series of *The Uncommercial Traveller*.

27 Bakhtin (1984), p. 299.

28 Lennartz, Norbert (2010), 'The *bête humaine* and Its Food in Nineteenth-Century Naturalist Fiction' *The Pleasures and Horrors of Eating: The Cultural History of Eating in Anglophone Literature*, ed. Marion Gymnich / Norbert Lennartz, Göttingen: V & R Uni P, p. 269.

29 Lennartz (2010), p. 264.

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wick Papers.[30] Dickens's fancy for cannibalism has different sources. Simpson suggests that stories such as Sam Weller's anecdote of the sausage factory in Chapter 30 have their origin in the urban legends and macabre tales which Dickens's nurse used to tell him as a child. Other prominent antecedents of Dickens's use of cannibalism are Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and, of course, Swift's 'A Modest Proposal.' In *The Pickwick Papers*, Bob Sawyer and Mr. Allen, approximating Swift's 'Proposal,' nonchalantly joke about eating children:

> 'Nothing like dissecting, to give one an appetite,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer, looking round the table.
> Mr. Pickwick slightly shuddered.
> 'By the bye, Bob,' said Mr. Allen, 'have you finished that leg yet?'
> 'Nearly,' replied Sawyer, helping himself to half a fowl as he spoke. 'It's a very muscular one for a child's.'
> 'Is it?' inquired Mr. Allen, carelessly.
> 'Very,' said Bob Sawyer, with his mouth full. (*PP*, pp. 392 – 3)

Already the very first sentence of the dialogue opens with a gross reference to cadavers, body parts and eating, setting the tone for the lines to follow. Bob Sawyer goes on with the whimsical idea of eating human flesh when chewing the leg of a fowl. He humorously complains that it is rather "muscular" and tough "for a child's," echoing the remarks of the narrator in Swift's 'Proposal' on how to pick the ideal age of the human cubs so that their meat is tender, since children above fourteen are "generally tough and lean."[31]

A similar instance of a cannibalistic joke referring the toughness of human flesh appears in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In a conversation between George Chuzzlewit and Mrs. Ned, after her accusing him of improper looks at her and her daughters "as if he could eat" them, he replies that

> 'At all events, if I was a cannibal,' said Mr George Chuzzlewit, greatly stimulated by this retort, 'I think it would occur to me that a lady who had outlived three husbands, and suffered so very little from their loss, must be most uncommonly tough.' (*MC*, p. 60)

George Chuzzlewit, just like the persona of the 'Proposal' who discards eating children whose flesh has hardened with exercise, ironically infers that a person of such age who shows such lack of tenderness in life must be "uncommonly tough," rendering Mrs. Ned's accusations void. Graham Greene writes in *Monsignor Quixote* that "logical thought does often lead to absurd situations." This statement cannot be truer of some of Dickens's and Swift's grotesque moments. To give an example which is quoted by Ruth Glancy, there is an

30 Hollington (1984), p. 45.
31 Swift, Jonathan (2009), *A Modest Proposal and Other Writings*, ed. Carole Fabricant, London: Penguin, p. 234.

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analogy with Swift's 'Proposal' regarding the inhuman treatment of the poor on the grounds of reason in *Oliver Twist* when the protagonist is "farmed" to a workhouse,[32] where

> twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head per week. Sevenpence-halfpenny's worth per week is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for sevenpence-halfpenny, quite enough to overload its stomach, and make it uncomfortable. (*OT*, p. 4)

I would suggest that these lines are reminiscent of the persona's suggestion in 'A Modest Proposal' that landlords be paid with children when their tenants run out of cattle or corn, or his calculations about the costs of maintaining children, which he estimates at ten shillings a year. Both Dickens and Swift actively denounce the inhumanity of essays of political economists such as Bacon or Malthus who regard people as statistical figures or animals, for Oliver is not just sent but "farmed" to live with other children like cattle. These "juvenile offenders against the poor-laws" become commodities for Mrs. Mann, just as the tenants of Swift's 'Proposal.' In fact, the 'Proposal' anticipates the empirical simplification of the Poor Law Acts after 1834, which also sponsor the separation of children from their parents in order to turn them into productive members of society, turning the poor into cattle. Both treat children as commodities, whether to eat them or to buy food at their expense, since Mrs. Mann "appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use" (*OT*, p. 4).

In his writings, Swift advocated moderation and condemned the excess of enthusiasm whether in politics, economy or religion. The dangers of an overstated devotion to a doctrine are best illustrated in *Hard Times*. In this novel, Dickens attacks systems and theories like Utilitarianism, which neglect the individual and focus only on reason and facts. Characters such as Mr. Gradgrind or Mr. Bounderby carry these beliefs to an extreme that verges on the absurd. Their utilitarian manners and economic calculus contrast with the fancy and imagination displayed by the circus and its people. Dickens reinforces the grotesqueness of the scenario by playing with the utilitarian claim that language should be strictly used in a denotative sense, juxtaposing Gradgrind's designative rhetoric with the evocative language of the circus.[33] Thus, when Mr. Gradgrind asks Sissy Jupe for the definition of a horse and she is unable to answer, he reproaches her for not possessing any facts. Gradgrind immediately

32 Glancy (1999), pp. 51 – 2.
33 Glancy (1999), pp. 103 – 4.

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asks Bitzer, the embodiment of Benthamite education, who immediately defines the horse as

> 'Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisives. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.' Thus (and much more) Bitzer. (*HT*, p. 6)

I think this exaggerated focus on facticity and reason to the extent of championing a language reform recalls Gulliver's visit to the School of Languages in the Academy of Lagado. This grotesque passage is meant to ridicule some proposals in favour of shortening discourse by abbreviations or reduction of syllables of longer words which Swift completely abhorred.[34] The people in Lagado reject allusive rhetoric and want to simplify language to the extreme of "expressing themselves by *Things*."[35] One would just carry a bundle with objects, and no words would be necessary. The practical approach to language described by Gulliver is as absurd as Gradgrind's conclusion that Sissy Jupe does not know what a horse is. In both novels over-rational thinking proves to be utterly unsuccessful not just at a conceptual level but, as Gradgrind realises towards the end of the narration, above all at the level of human relations.

The last instances I will examine appear in *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and are representative of Dickens's general impression of America. Dickens compares his adventures on the American continent with Gulliver's return home from the country of the Houyhnhnms:

> That travelled creation of the great satirist's brain, who fresh from living among horses, peered from a high casement down upon his own kind with trembling horror, was scarcely more repelled and daunted by the sight, than those who look upon some of these faces for the first time must surely be. (*AN*, p. 154)

This passage evinces Dickens's general disappointment after his first-hand experience of America.[36] Dickens expected to find in the 'New World' a country based on individual freedom and chances. The 'Eden' that had been advertised in the old continent was nothing more than a grotesque hell. Instead of a land of opportunities, Dickens encountered a country founded on capitalism, slavery, insufferable weather and boorish manners, feeling like Gulliver among humans

34 Ian Higgins, in the notes to the edition of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 330.

35 Swift (2008), p. 173.

36 Hollington quotes these lines in a different context. He points out that there are several references in Dickens's works to Don Cleophas taking off the rooftops of the houses in order to expose mankind's vices and follies. One of the instances that Hollington quotes is the sensationalist standpoint of New York's newspapers ("pulling off the roofs of private houses") that Dickens so much reproaches in *American Notes*, as Swift when he "peered from a high casement down upon his own kind." Hollington (1984), pp. 155–6.

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after having lived with the wise horses. In *Martin Chuzzlewit,* the Victorian writer mentions Swift once again in connection with America, this time while discussing freedom of speech. The gentleman talking to Martin explains that

> no satirist could breathe this air. If another Juvenal or Swift could rise up among us tomorrow, he would be hunted down. If you have any knowledge of our literature, and can give me the name of any man, American born and bred, who has anatomized our follies as a people, and not as this or that party; and who has escaped the foulest and most brutal slander, the most inveterate hatred and intolerant pursuit; it will be a strange name in my ears, believe me. (*MC*, pp. 276 – 7)

Dickens was fascinated by Swift's satirical wit and highly ironic but clear manner of portraying and criticising contemporary society, becoming the ideal source of inspiration for the representation of his bitter disillusionment. Incidentally, Dickens's accounts of the American experience in these books, written between 1842 and 1844, concur with an increased presence of Swift in his personal letters, for most allusions to Swift in his correspondence date from 1839 to 1849.[37] Moreover, explicit references to Swift also abound in *American Notes*, especially to exaggerate the grotesqueness of a particularly shocking image, such as his impression of the conditions of the "negro car:"

> As a black man never travels with a white one, there is also a negro car; which is a great blundering clumsy chest, such as Gulliver put to sea in, from the kingdom of Brobdingnag. (*AN*, p. 72)

Or his depiction of the facilities of a Boston Institution stuffed with orphans and young children, where "the stairs are of lilliputian measurement, fitted to their tiny strides" (*AN*, p. 57).

5. Conclusion

Even though the grotesque has different qualities in the works of both writers, there is no question that Swift genuinely influenced Dickens's creation of the grotesque. While Swift's grotesque writings are mostly satires in which fantasy is carried to the extreme of absurdity, Dickens's grotesque is, above all, the result of a hypertrophic imagination that blurs, at times, the boundaries between the ordinary and the fantastic. However, both writers are in favour of exaggerated images which combine just the right amount of disgust and humour as well as

37 To give some examples, there are allusions to Swift or his writings in a letter to George Cattermole, 21 August 1839 (1965 – 2000, vol. 1, p. 576), a letter to John Forster, 14 July 1839 (1965 – 2000, vol. 1, p. 564), a letter to Lady Holland, 11 July 1842 (1965 – 2000, vol. 3, p. 266), a letter to the Rev. Charles De la Pryme, 2 February 1849 (1965 – 2000, vol. 5, p. 484), and in a Letter to John Forster, 7 October 1849 (1965 – 2000, vol. 5, p. 623).

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caustic criticism of their respective societies. As the instances adduced in this paper show, Swiftian elements are especially prominent in Dickens's grotesque characterisations of food ingestion or in his endeavours to discredit the absurdity of contemporary political and economic theories. The two writers are, indeed, kindred spirits, and Dickens's indelible memory of Swift is manifest in the many explicit and implicit references throughout the whole of his literary career.

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Dieter Koch (Vechta)

2.6 Dickens and the Tradition of the British Picaresque: Smollett, Dickens and Chance

Researching the field of the so-called 'British picaresque tradition' one invariably gets confronted with an almost identical genealogy of novels whether one uses sources that are more than a century old or checks with modern Wikipedia. Usually starting with Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller* this seemingly time-resistant list further includes Defoe, Smollett and Fielding as its 18th-century exponents before finally naming Dickens as the most important writer of the nineteenth century with picaresque leanings. Some critics have at least narrowed down this affiliation to his early novels. The longevity of this particular canonical label is astonishing since a lot of research has been done over the years to refine this superficial classification which in the case of the picaresque novel can be verified by the critical contributions of Robert Alter, Stuart Miller and others.[1] All these scholars have tried to come up with core definitions of what both picaresque and *picaro* really meant by distilling a number of characteristics from the Spanish originals like *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) and Mateo Aleman's *Guzman de Alfarache* (1599).

The original *picaro* is a young man from a poor and low family background who, after an initial phase of gullability, is confronted with the evil nature of the world by a shocking event that serves as his initiation rite into the circle of streetwise adventurers and fortune hunters. He cannot form stable relationships, he cannot love or feel strong emotion, other characters come and go, but how ever hard he tries to gain a secure position in the world, the threat of the fall always remains his close companion. While his own character never changes he shifts from milieu to milieu, experiences re-meetings with characters brought about by chance and this accident pattern creates unease in the reader who identifies with the *picaro's* Sisyphos destiny. The episodical plot structure represents the cha-

1 See Miller, Stuart (1967), *The Picaresque Novel*, Cleveland / OH: Press of Case Western Reserve; Alter, Robert (1965), 'The Picaroon as Fortune's Plaything' *Essays on the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. Robert Donald Specter, Bloomington: Indiana UP, pp. 131 – 51; Hartveit, Lars (1987), *Workings of the Picaresque in the British Novel*, Oslo: Solum Forlag.

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otic lack of order in the world and also furthers the *picaro's* sense of isolation and the prevailing mood of the *solo soy,*[2] which again is expressed by the protagonist's first-person account of events as the picaresque prototypical, but limited point of view.

Following these picaresque characteristics and comparing them to both the early works of Dickens and one of his 18th-century precursors one must inevitably come to the conclusion that neither of these works can truly be called 'picaresque.' Focussing on Smollett (and disregarding Fielding), one has to admit that *Roderick Random* is the only novel that has a first-person narrator. But Roderick does not come from a poor and low family background. Peregrine Pickle not only lacks the initial naivety of the *picaro*, on the contrary, he seems to have been born as a master manipulator and dissembler. Ferdinand Count Fathom's low family background is ameliorated right on the very first page of the novel when he is adopted by the grateful Count Melvile. Launcelot Greaves is not a *picaro* either but rather a knight-errant that was transplanted from a romance plot, where Providence wins over disorder, into a novel. He is never tempted by any of the vices like gambling and drinking or by amorous adventures a real *picaro* is so susceptible of; his guiding principles are to save his damsel in distress and achieve justice on his *queste*. Finally, of course, there is *Humphry Clinker*, where to make out a candidate for *picaro* can only prove futile as Matthew Bramble is an elderly baronet with a good education and the titular hero only appears for the first time when two thirds of the novel are already over. Additionally, the strange multipolar point of view of the epistolary form does rather contradict the isolation of the individual that is so characteristic of the picaresque mode.

After Smollett's novels have now been disqualified as picaresque prototypes, what about Dickens's early work? Mister Pickwick is too old at the outset of the novel and not even close to being illiterate. Oliver Twist musters the courage to ask for more food in the workhouse but does not develop into a streetwise kid. He remains largely passive and, with one exception, never really strikes back as a real *picaro* would once he is initiated. And who would qualify as *picaro* in *The Old Curiosity Shop?* Surely not Little Nell although she is isolated enough in this world, but she has a heart for everyone which makes her far too emphatic for this role. And of course, we must not forget that we have to wait until *David Copperfield* to read the first of Dickens's novels with a first-person narrator.

At last, what connects all the above-mentioned novels is the episodical plot

2 For an explanation of this term see Köhler, Erich (1993), *Der literarische Zufall: Das Mögliche und die Notwendigkeit*, Munich: Fink Verlag, p. 34. Köhler calls it an "existentielle Grundbefindlichkeit," stating that "weder eine fürsorgliche Providenz, noch ein schützendes Kollektiv entheben ihn [the picaro] der prästabilisierten Heimatlosigkeit. Die Ich-Form des pikaresken Erzählens kommt nicht von ungefähr."

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structure which makes them resemble an original picaresque novel, a plot structure that considering the state of the world could prove more philosophical than a causal one. This structure is also responsible for the opinion of numerous critics like Arthur Quiller-Couch that have judged both Smollett's and Dickens's early work as structurally ill-conceived or simply clumsy and bad handicraft.[3] This parallel leads us to the question: How far was Dickens influenced as a reader of Smollett's novels by the latter's work? Which methods and literary strategies did he assimilate or copy and where did he take a different turn and remain his own man? That Dickens knew Smollett's work is evident when we read the autobiographical fragment both in Forster's *Life* Vol. 1 and the fourth chapter of *David Copperfield:* "My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs, to which I had access […] from that blessed little room Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphry Clinker […] came out […] to keep me company."[4] And Forster also comments on this statement: "It is one of many passages in *Copperfield* which are literally true." Even earlier, in his preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens had hinted at his familiarity with Smollett's oeuvre: "I was not a very robust child, sitting in bye-places, near Rochester castle, with a head full of Partridge, Strap and Tom Pipes."[5] Dickens's reminiscences are also confirmed by the surviving inventory of his own library and by visitors like Elizabeth Gaskell, who saw "a goodly array of standard works,"[6] whereas G.H. Lewes remarked somewhat snobbishly, "he still remained completely outside philosophy, science and the higher literature."[7] No wonder George Eliot insisted that Dickens was only interested in exterior things and did not look into the soul of characters, a complaint, by the way, that was also frequently made by Smollett's critics. Right from the beginning of his literary career Dickens has constantly been seen in some sort of connection with Smollett by the contemporary critical public, no matter how different the individual judgements have finally turned out to be. The journal *Athenaeum* published an unsigned review of the *Pickwick Papers* in 1836 that stated: "Pickwick is made up of two pounds of Smollett, three ounces of Sterne, a handful of Hook and a dash of grammatical Pierce Egan."[8] Charles Buller in the *London & Westminster Review* and Abraham Hayward in the *Quarterly Review* differed in their respective opinions which of

3 Quiller-Couch, Arthur T. (1925), *Dickens and Other Victorians*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 67, p. 164.
4 Dickens, Charles (2004), *David Copperfield*, ed. Jeremy Tambling, London: Penguin, p.66.
5 Dickens, Charles (2003), *Nicholas Nickleby*, ed. Mark Ford, London: Penguin, p. 6.
6 Gaskell, Elizabeth (1966), *Letters of Mrs Gaskell,* ed. J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, Manchester: Manchester UP, p. 109.
7 Shattock, Joanne (1988), *Dickens and Other Victorians*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 81
8 Collins, Philip ed. (1971), *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, New York: Barnes & Noble, p. 32; the last ingredient of this recipe is correctly identified here as one source of Dickens's grotesque humour, the tradition of visual or graphic satire.

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the two authors should be higher rated. Whereas Buller prophesied that "Dickens should aspire to the renown of Fielding and Smollett and possibly surpass it,"[9] Hayward came to the conclusion that Dickens "hasn't got Smollett's dash, vivacity and wild spirit of adventure and rich poetic imagination."[10] G.H. Lewes, sitting on the fence, decreed from his somewhat aloof position that "Dickens should be compared to no one since no one has written like him."[11]

In the twentieth century, literary critics continued to mention Smollett prominently when reviewing or researching Dickens. While G. Saintsbury called Dickens "Smollett's great imitator,"[12] F.R. Leavis, however, contrasted Smollett's "brutal humour" unfavourably with Dickens's "profound genius."[13] In 1928, Pieter Frans Wierstra, in a little known monograph, compared the language of both authors and came to the conclusion that Dickens's debt to Smollett was considerable.[14] Damian Grant elaborated on this point by acknowledging for both authors that "the distortion of language in dialogue has been pushed beyond the point where it has any moral implications, into the sphere of pure linguistic virtuosity."[15] As an example of this statement he names Smollett's Captain Crowe and Dickens's Mr Jingle. Moreover, in both author's works there are also wonderful examples of malapropism. Especially Smollett's protagonists Commodore Trunnion or Tabitha Bramble are noteworthy considering that all of Smollett's novels were written at least a decade before the term was popularised by Sheridan. As for Dickens, it is surely a piquant note to connect him with malapropism after Claire Tomalin in her recent biography of Dickens left room for speculation whether in fact Sheridan could have been Dickens's grandfather, the origin of his father's male parent apparently being somewhat dubious.[16]

Apart from the language of the two authors literary critics have also pointed out similarities between Dickens and Smollett in the drawing of character. This is regarded as both authors' forte. Smollett excels in the description of abnormal figures, everyday ordinary people are only sparsely described. Like Dickens he favours exaggerations like 'gargantuan' or 'herculian.' Several of his oddities, like Commodore Trunnion, have strange defects. The venerable seadog has only one eye and one heel. Similarly, in *Great Expectations,* Dickens describes a person that grins so often that the lower half of his face has taken on a distorted form. Specimen like that probably led John Ruskin to the conclusion that

9 Ibid., p. 54.
10 Ibid., p. 57.
11 Ibid., p. 64.
12 Saintsbury, George (1927), *The English Novel*, London: Dent, p. 37.
13 Leavis, F.R. and Q.D. Leavis (1970), *Dickens: The Novelist*, London: Chatto & Windus, p. 34.
14 Wierstra, Frans D. (1928), *Smollett and Dickens*, Den Helder: De Boer.
15 Grant, Damian (1977), *Tobias Smollett: A Study in Style*, Manchester: Manchester UP, p. 44.
16 Tomalin, Claire (2012), *Dickens: A Life*, London: Viking, pp. 3–6.

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"Dickens describes eccentricity more often than character."[17] Then, of course, there are the really grotesque figures which both authors describe in abundance. In the following examples the mixed aesthetics and combined contradictions in the characters are further supplemented by a certain degree of liminality. One of Dickens's best known examples of this species is Daniel Quilp, the persecutor of Little Nell and her grandfather in *The Old Curiosity Shop.* He has a giant's head, but only a small body and repeatedly flashes a dog-like smile (!). A similar dehumanisation is inflicted on Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* whose forefinger leaves a gluey trail on the paper like a snail. Smollett comes up with similar examples like the crazy bigot Sir Mungo Barebones, the self-styled defender of orthodox Christianity, who is described in one of his ravings:

> Being naturally of a meagre habit, he was by indigence and hard study, wore almost to the bone, and so bended towards the earth, that in walking his body described at least 150 degrees of a circle […] he trusted in God, that […] he should be able to confute and overthrow the false philosophy of the moderns, and to restore the writings of Moses to pre-eminence […]he spoke of the immortal Newton with infinite contempt […] Sir Mungo, though in all appearance reduced to the last stage of animal [!] existence, no sooner heard this epithet applied to his plan, […] than he sprung from his seat with the agility of a grasshopper [!] and darting himself out the door.[18]

Beside the description of single characters there are also parallels between entire types of characters like, for instance, the elderly spinster, in Smollett represented by Miss Grizzle and Miss Bramble, in Dickens by Miss Brass, Miss Dartle, Miss Tox , Miss Crumpton and others. They are usually drawn as 'bony,' 'stiff,' 'thin' or painted with too much rouge and nervously hopping around. Furthermore there are congruent constellations of characters in both works. One must only think of the Don Quixote/Sancho Pansa epigones Pickwick/Weller in Dickens and Roderick/Strap or Launcelot Greaves/Crabshaw in Smollett.

People holding a public office are also the butt of comic depiction by both authors. Compare the descriptions in *Oliver Twist* of Bumble, the beadle ("thick, choleric head"), of Judge Fang ("red face of an alcoholic") or of Judge Stareleigh ("so fat he consists only of a red face and vest") with the appearance of magistrate Gobble and his headstrong wife in *Launcelot Greaves:*

> Mr. Gobble sat in judgement, with a crimson velvet nightcap on his head, and on his right hand appeared his lady, puffed up with the pride and the insolence of her hus-

17 Collins, Philip (1971), p. 101.

18 Smollett, Tobias (2006), *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom*, Boston / MA: Indy Publish.com, pp. 191 – 95.

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> band's office, fat, frouzy, and not overclean, well-stricken in years […] having a rubicund nose […] and an imperious aspect.[19]

More important, however, than all the above-mentioned parallels between the two writers is their similar treatment of persons that represent an all-explaining ideology or belief system. Be it pseudo-scientists, pseudo-philosophers or evangelical clerics, Dickens ridicules them all either as humbugs or as uneducated Pharisees. Starting with the hypocritical Stiggins in *The Pickwick Papers* followed by the persistently inebriated St John Rivers (the red nose again!) and Chadband in *Bleak House*, Dickens also disavows the social determinism of Bounderby and the Benthamite reductionism of Gradgrind in *Hard Times*. In *Dombey and Son* Dickens exposes in a comical fashion what happens when a demagogue like the Reverend Melchisedech Howler arouses a crowd of fanatical believers that have switched their brains off:

> The reception of the ladies and gentlemen of the ranting persuasion, upon whom, on the first occasion of their assemblage the admonitions of the Reverend Melchisedech Howler had produced so powerful an effect, that in their rapturous performance of a sacred jig, which closed the service, the whole flock broke through the kitchen below, where they disabled a mangle.[20]

Smollett even manages to unmask two grand narratives with one stroke in *Peregrine Pickle*. Peregrine's tutor is both a Church of England minister and a learned mathematician. As they embark for their Grand Tour a storm comes up and threatens to drown them in the English Channel. The tutor named Jolter is frightened to death and starts to pray. But instead of uttering the Lord's Prayer he mistakenly pronounces with great fervour:

> The time of a complete oscillation in the cycloid, is to the time in which a body would fall through the axis of a cycloid DV, as the circumference of a circle to its diameter […] After the end of the storm, Jolter cried with utmost horror […] Lord have mercy upon us! And repeated this supplication as if it were mechanically until the skipper undeceived him that the squall was over.[21]

The creeds have become interchangeable and therefore severely devalued or cut to size. The disturbing factor or element in life responsible for checking and balancing all-embracing ideologies is chance. According to Hegel, all ideologies have to renounce its existence whether they explain it away with Divine Provi-

19 Smollett, Tobias (2005), *The Adventures of Launcelot Greaves*, Doylestown / PA: Wildside Press, p. 139.

20 Dickens, Charles (1970), *Dombey and Son*, ed. Peter Fairclough, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 278.

21 Smollett, Tobias (1935), *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, New York: Tudor Publishing Co., pp. 153 – 54.

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dence or with the scientific law of probability.[22] But chance is constantly present in both works of Smollett and Dickens; they both revel in spaces where accidents flourish. Spas, inns and taverns, prisons, insane asylums and most importantly the city as an urban labyrinth[23] are good breeding ground for unforeseeable incidents that also make literary plots seem more improbable, which are then in turn, sometimes unjustifiedly considered as badly executed by critics. However, defending themselves against the charge of improbability the two authors use thoroughly different strategies. Whereas Smollett flatly denies to have committed such a literary *faux pas*,[24] Dickens questions the concept of Victorian "realism" altogether in a letter written in 1859:

> The merit or art of the narrator is the manner of stating the truth […] it seems to me there is a world to be done. And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like […] a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do – I have an idea that the very holding of literature […] may depend on […] fanciful treatment.[25]

There might even be a connection between the fact that contingency is given so much room in Dickens's work and his utter distaste of anything resembling calculations and statistics. Following his much admired Carlyle[26] who held the opinion that "tables are like cobwebs […] beautifully reticulated, orderly to look upon, but will hold no conclusions. Tables are abstractions,"[27] Dickens was convinced that statistics deprived people of their humanity and that they were even used to obstruct social progress.[28] Even very early on in his career as a writer

22 Hegel, G.F.W. (1955), *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, Hamburg: Meiner, p. 29.

23 Koerner, Joseph L. (1998), 'Contingency and the City' *Kontingenz*, ed. Gerhart v. Gravenitz / Odo Marquard, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, pp. 435 – 43 explains the connection between nostalgia for the closed world of the village and the desire for a world purged of accidents and chance.

24 In the preface to *Roderick Random* Smollett claims "I have not deviated from nature, in the facts, which are all true," and simultaneously accuses Le Sage of this very mistake, "his transitions from distress to happiness are so sudden […] this conduct deviates from probability." See Smollett, Tobias (1999), *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé, Oxford: Oxford UP, xxxiv – xxxv.

25 Ford, George H. (1955), *Dickens and His Readers*, Princeton / NJ: Princeton UP, pp. 134 – 35. Elsewhere Dickens calls the inadequacy of naturalist cataloguing a "dreary arithmetical dustiness that is powerfully depressing." See Dickens, Charles (1937/38), *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 2, ed. Walter Dexter, London: Nonesuch P, p. 352.

26 See Preface to Dickens, Charles (2003), *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. Richard Maxwell, London: Penguin, p. ix.

27 Cohen, Bernard (2005), *The Triumph of Numbers: How Counting Shaped Modern Life*, New York: Norton & Co., p. 147.

28 The most obvious example, of course, of all his novels is *Hard Times* with Mr. Gradgrind stating right at the beginning "Now what I want is facts […] nothing but facts." See Dickens, Charles (1994), *Hard Times,* London: Penguin Popular Classics, p. 1.

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this enmity was highlighted in a series of articles written for *Bentley's Miscellany* where he satirises the recently founded British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) by converting them into "The Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything." Among its leading functionaries the "Professors Snore, Doze and Wheezy" are listed, also in attendance at the first meeting are "Mr. Slug, celebrated for his statistical research" and "the vice-president of the statistics section, Mr. Leadbrain."[29] All of these ridiculed figures, of course, stand only as representatives for science's teleological and near metaphysical claim formulated by Laplace:

> Given for one instant an intelligence able to comprehend all nature's forces – an intelligence vast enough to analyze all these data – it would include in a single formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of its lightest atom. For it, nothing would be uncertain, and the future, like the past, would be present to its eyes.[30]

It is indeed this pseudo-metaphysical quality of science's position that also brings Smollett to attack its representatives like surgeons, apothecaries, natural philosophers, and to reveal them as charlatans in the same heavy-handed manner as he treats members of the clergy. Both groups are depicted as hypocritical, greedy and, as the narrator in *Peregrine Pickle* comments with relish, "because they are only among themselves or among low-life […] their perception is obscured […] and therefore are ideal tutors for the young."[31] In *Launcelot Greaves*, the adventuring knight ironically treats the two belief systems as interchangeable and indirectly pleads the cause for chance by remarking "the doctor, like a true priest, deals in mysteries and oracles that would admit of different and indeed contrary interpretations."[32] This, of course, alludes to the classical definition of chance or contingency[33] as we already find it in Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, meaning the possibility of "Not-Being" or "Being Different."[34]

Another method to discredit both science's probability and orthodox Christianity's Providence is used by Smollett with an almost nerve-racking frequency. When relating an event his narrators use interjections like "in all

29 Cohen, Bernard (2005), pp. 149 – 50.

30 Kavanagh, Thomas M. (1993), *Enlightenment and the Shadow of Chance*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, p. 23; this aspiration has miraculously re-emerged in recent years in the shape of predictions made by leading figures of the computer industries like W. Gates.

31 Smollett, Tobias (1935), p. 66; pp. 149 – 50.

32 Smollett, Tobias (2005), p. 38.

33 According to Wetz, Franz Josef (1998), 'Die Begriffe Zufall und Kontingenz' *Kontingenz*, ed. Gerhart v. Gravenitz / Odo Marquard, p. 29, the two terms have been interchangeable since Kant.

34 Ibid., p. 27.

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probability" or "by intervention of Heaven," "in all likelihood" or "by the power of Providence" indiscriminately, sometimes as often as four or five times on one page, to indicate the cause or an agency for the impending action. What Smollett achieves, however, by revealing the two terminologies as mere rhetorics, is to create confusion and devalue both explanatory concepts. And as if this was not enough he increases the confusion by bringing chance into the game. The results are sentences like "We recommended our souls to God, and had the good fortune to escape,"[35] or in a more redundant form "fortune ordained [!] that the design should be defeated."[36]

The disapproval of both religion and science in its dogmatic, extremist and all-explaining shape is clearly a part of Smollett's and Dickens's work. The case of Dickens, however, seems to be a bit more complicated than that of Smollett where the deconstruction of Divine Providence is far more blatant. A possible explanation could be Forster's quotation that shows Dickens looking back on his life and his difficult childhood:

> I know that, but for the Mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or vagabond […] something of the presence and influence of that spirit which directs my life, and through heavy sorrow has pointed upward with unchanging finger.[37]

Dennis Walder concludes from these lines that "the religious usage reflects the sense of a Providential guiding hand which Dickens frequently felt as a real force in his life."[38] But how did he convert this intuition of Providence into novel-writing? What kind of Providence are we talking about? It seems to be a very personal affair with Dickens, nothing dogmatic and prescriptive, but rather childlike in its belief. On the other hand, Dickens also refrains in his writing from sliding into the phantastic and the supernatural. When at all, he only uses what Leland Monk calls "general Providence […] to consolidate a sense of religious faith in accord with the empirical world."[39] Whereas "general Providence" means that God's will manifests itself in accordance with the natural laws, "special Providence" manipulates and eventually invalidates those. The principle of cause and effect is suspended. But Dickens, the moderate, does not make use of this tool of 'romance' in his novels. His need to bring his personal creed into line with his recognition of the powerful potential of coincidence or chance in the novel makes him, for example, design a particular narrative structure.

35 Smollett, Tobias (2006), p. 114.
36 Ibid., p. 69.
37 Walder, Dennis (1981), *Dickens and Religion*, London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 8.
38 Ibid., p. 8.
39 Monk, Leland (1993), *Standard Deviations: Chance and the British Modern Novel*, Stanford: Stanford UP, p. 38.

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This can be demonstrated quite lucidly in *Bleak House*. No other novel of Dickens is so full of coincidences, suspicions, guesses and mistakes of characters. Not even Inspector Bucket, the model of logical deduction, is infallible. Countless chance encounters later become of consequence, but all this is done so casually that the reader can hardly recognise it. W.J Harvey describes the effect of Dickens's technique on the reader:

> Coincidence is accepted as natural part of the *Bleak House* world […] coincidence is to the microcosm of the novel what the law of gravity is […] to the real world. We accept both as natural laws […] chance is not the malign symptom of some metaphysical destiny, we do not rebel because chance reigns with fine impartiality […].[40]

So apparently coincidence or chance reigns supreme, and above all towering and overshadowing the novel stands this mighty spatial symbol, the Court of Chance(ry). But a providential point of view is introduced through the back door of the double narrative structure. Looking only through the eyes of Esther Summerson we know nothing about the secret plots and conspiracies that take place, we are landlocked in the existential human position. The omniscient narrator of the second narrative strand, however, informs us of what goes on behind the scenes, giving us a glimpse inside the creator's laboratory and thus perforating our *asylum ignorantiae*.[41]

Thereby Dickens also diminishes or smoothes the impact of recognition that chance can never be fully brought under control. This, of course, is a very modern *credo*, which thinkers from Freud to Rorty and Foucault[42] would willingly subscribe to. It is astonishing, however, to what extent chance is given room in both the work of Smollett and Dickens considering they were writing centuries ago. This also becomes particularly apparent when we look at the treatment of gambling in both author's work. In *Ferdinand Count Fathom* the futility of enlightenment's probability discourse is again demonstrated by Smollett. The protagonist, who is an expert gambler, is left frustrated by the vicissitudes of chance:

> Fathom found some difficulty in concealing his joy at the mention of his last amusement, which had been one of his chief studies, and in which he had made such progress,

40 Harvey, W.J. (1967), 'Chance and Design in *Bleak House*' *Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Price, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., pp. 143 – 45.

41 Nietzsche, Friedrich (1980), *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 3, Munich / Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, p. 468.

42 See Foucault, Michel (1978), *Dispositive der Macht*, Berlin: Merve Verlag, p. 27 where history is perceived as "Ort der absoluten Kontingenz" and Foucault, Michel (1974), *Von der Subversion des Wissens,* Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, p. 98 in which Foucault claims that "history obeys the chance of the fight" (my transl.); see also Freud, Sigmund (1969), *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8, Frankfurt / M.: S. Fischer Verlag, p. 210 where Freud states "that basically everything in our lives is down to chance" (my transl.).

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> that he could calculate all the chances with the utmost exactness and certainty […] but fortune declared its favour [of the opponent], and Fathom lost all his money.[43]

A bit later on, Ferdinand still does not realise that chance cannot be controlled but blames his losses on the spirit of the age of this 'grand siècle de jeu':

> He perceived that gaming was now managed in such a manner, as rendered skill and dexterity of no advantage. For the spirit of play having overspread the land, like a pestilence, raged to such a degree of madness and desperation, that the unhappy people who were infected, laid aside all thoughts of amusement, economy or caution, and risked their fortunes upon issues equally extravagant, childish and absurd […] the whole mystery of art was reduced to the simple exercise of tossing up a coin.[44]

Similar misperceptions are also the problem of Nell's grandfather in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*. His behaviour indeed mirrors the development of Western philosophical thought. First he relies on Providence when he says "a weary life, but there is a great end to gain," but like a true Puritan he struggles with his God wondering why "God never prospers me […] it has come to other men who do nothing but wait."[45] Further on in the novel however, he switches over to the Enlightenment discourse of probability and tries to calm himself by insisting that "these figures [are] the result of long calculations."[46] Yet when he loses again, the final time, he has to realise that chance cannot be tamed and significantly describes gambling as a "phantom."[47]

Whether the fact that chance or contingency plays such a prominent role in both Dickens's and Smollett's work can be understood as an anticipation of the fragmented modern individual, intuitively perceived by sensitive artists, remains open to discussion. Maybe the answer in Dickens's case is much simpler and more modest, as a quotation from Forster seems to convey: "On the coincidences and surprises of life Dickens liked especially to dwell, and few things moved his fancy so pleasantly."[48]

But when Robert Alter chose the title 'The Picaroon as Fortune's Plaything' for his essay, he may have unwittingly given us a hint why the works of Smollett and Dickens have remained on the notorious list of novels that constitute the 'British Picaresque Tradition' for so long and will probably remain there until the court case of Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce will be resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

43 Smollett, Tobias (2006), p. 107.
44 Ibid., p. 239.
45 Dickens, Charles (1999), *The Old Curiosity Shop*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brennan, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 13, p. 15, p. 16; whether Dickens intentionally uses Patience's soothing words to Milton's blind poet to express exactly the opposite here I can only speculate.
46 Ibid., p. 82.
47 Ibid., p. 76.
48 Harvey, W.J. (1967), p. 146.

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Walder, Dennis (1981), *Dickens and Religion*, London: George Allen & Unwin.
Wetz, Franz Josef (1998), 'Die Begriffe Zufall und Kontingenz' *Kontingenz*, ed. Gerhart v. Gravenitz / Odo Marquard, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, pp. 27 – 34.
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2.7 Reading Postmodernity into *Our Mutual Friend*: the World as Text and the Desecration and Redemption of Reading

Since the publication of Clayton's book *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace* in 2003 it has no longer seemed incongruous to establish a link between the 'Inimitable' and postmodernism. Clayton in fact distinguishes two versions of post-modernism; the first one, which he dates back to the 1960s, is characterised by literary narcissism, self-conscious writing and auto-referentiality – it is, according to Linda Hutcheon, "intramural,"[1] i. e. resolutely turned towards the text. The post-1980s version of post-modernism would, according to Clayton, spread far beyond the literary realm to cover various facets of the post-industrial world in which signs, simulacrum and commodity fetishism have become part and parcel of our common experience. The subject, when it is mentioned at all, is of necessity deconstructed. It is for Clayton to this second wave of post-modernism that Dickens can be related.[2]

The purpose of this paper is to span the gap between these two levels of postmodernism to argue that *Our Mutual Friend* answers to all the criteria set forth by Clayton. Indeed, Dickens's last completed novel would correspond to what Barthes defined as a "writerly text"[3] in so far as it is in large parts concerned with the production of meaning as much as with telling a story, whilst it also bears witness to a world in which signs and meretricious social protocols are increasingly replacing any direct access to the tangible real and in which genuine relationships between private individuals or group members are superseded by artificial performances. As has been often shown by criticism, the experience of reading, reading in all its guises, so to speak, is insistently put into the limelight throughout the novel. In 'The Motif of Reading in *Our Mutual Friend*,' Stanley

1 Hutcheon, Linda (1985), *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, New York: Methuen, pp. 43 – 4.

2 Clayton, Jay (2003), *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace. The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture*, Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. 147 – 48.

3 Barthes, Roland (1974), *S/Z*, translated by Richard Miller, New York: Hill and Wang, p. 4.

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Friedman[4] showed that far from being derivative the motifs of reading and literacy not only reinforce the novel's themes but also help move the plot forward and deepen the characters. More recently, Rosemary Mundhenk[5] in 'The Education of the Reader in *Our Mutual Friend*' drew from Iser's phenomenology of reading to show how Dickens, by limiting the reader's point of view, places him or her in the same situation as the character of Bella Wilfer and leads him to progressively discover, without any authorial guidance, the game that is being played by Boffin, the Golden Dustman.

The topic of reading in this paper is considered in another perspective. The aim is to show that postmodern paradigms may prove to be pertinent to *Our Mutual Friend* in retrospect. Dickens's own reading experience as constitutive of his fiction-writing is therefore not the focus of this analysis which occupies the other end of the chain, as it were, by turning its attention to the reception of Dickens at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Such a study can only be carried out with the *caveat* that no anachronistic meaning be artificially imposed on this fiction from the early 1860s. To begin with, it will be shown that Dickens was conscious of the fact that by the 1860s the range of the material offered for reading far exceeded the realm of high literature. In some cases, reading could be trivialised as the developing printing industry led to the publication of unworthy books liable to impoverish people's creativity. So the all-pervasive theme of sterility underpinning the novel may equally apply to the experience of reading itself in certain circumstances. To enlarge upon this first set of remarks it will be suggested that it is the whole society of *Our Mutual Friend* which is contaminated by the sense of loss and that in this context, Dickens's world is described as a vacuous text destined to mask the ontological void of the real. However, the risk would be to surrender to nihilism and in a last part it will be contended that postmodernism is, to a certain extent, indebted to Romanticism, and that through reading precisely, Dickens introduces a form of the sublime, transcending the overall sense of barrenness which he conjures up in his fiction. Ultimately then reading is both desecrated and redeemed.

4 Friedman, Stanley (1973), 'The Motif of Reading in *Our Mutual Friend*' *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 28, pp. 38 – 61.

5 Mundhenk, Rosemary (1979), 'The Education of the Reader in *Our Mutual Friend*' *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 34, pp. 41 – 58.

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1. The Experience of Reading Demeaned

As a rule, the experience of reading is celebrated in Dickens's fiction-writing; with a humorous touch when Peggotty concludes from David Copperfield's reading that crocodiles must be "a sort of vegetables,"[6] or with solemnity, when Pip endeavours to grapple with the mystery of his origins from the shapes of letters carved on tombstones.[7] In her recent biography, Claire Tomalin shows how learning to read was to remain for Charles Dickens indelibly linked to the figure of his mother: "This makes Elizabeth Dickens sound like a mother who cherished her son through careful teaching which sparked his imagination, and from then on words were associated with pleasure and he was set on his path."[8] In sharp contrast, *Our Mutual Friend* confronts the reader to a totally different reality. Firstly, Silas Wegg, referred to as "the literary man," happens to be one of the novel's villains, for whom reading amounts at best to a mercantile transaction and at its worst to downright swindling. He peddles his wares from a stall which is pleonastically associated with sterility: "the hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in London."[9] Worse still, it is exposed to the East wind, always a troubling sign as evidenced by John Jarndyce who in *Bleak House* worries whenever the wind is in the East.[10] Wegg is the perfect illustration of what Henry Mayhew calls "a pinner-up,"[11] i. e. he displays for sale ballads which he has purchased beforehand from presses such as Catnach and Pitts and which he then copies out to make a profit.[12] These pieces of writing contain misspellings and, more or less deliberate, misquotes, and circulate all the stereotypical and cliché-ridden ideas of the moment. They are proof of the used-upness of language, a post-modern topic *par excellence*, whenever words are severed off from linguistic creativity. Because they shut the stall on all sides the ballads are described by Boffin as "book-leaf blinkers" (*OMF*, p. 57), which may in passing suggest that they shut out the scope of intellectual understanding. This absence of mental pliancy and plasticity is snidely suggested by Boffin who, probably unwittingly,

6 Dickens, Charles (1987), *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, ed. Trevor Blount, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 65.
7 Dickens, Charles (1999), *Great Expectations*, ed. Edgar Rosenberg, New York / London: Norton, p. 9.
8 Tomalin, Claire (2011), *Charles Dickens. A Life*, London: Viking, p. 10.
9 Dickens, Charles (1997), *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Adrian Poole, London: Penguin Classics, p. 53.
10 Dickens, Charles (1981), *Bleak House*, ed. Norman Page, Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, p. 114.
11 Mayhew, Henry (1967), *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 1, London: Frank Cass, p. 272.
12 Cotsell, Michael (1986), *The Companion to* Our Mutual Friend, London: Allen & Unwin, p. 51.

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associates Wegg's wooden leg and the fact that he is literate: "A literary man – *with* a wooden leg – and all Print is open to him!" (*OMF*, p. 57). Such physical woodenness, which may be the counterpart for mental wooden-headedness, is subsequently confirmed by Wegg's own admission that his relation to text can only be agonistic: "I believe you couldn't show me the piece of English print that I wouldn't be equal to collaring and throwing" (*OMF*, p. 57). This mental stiffness, precluding any intellectual negotiation between mind and text, is the very opposite of literary hermeneutics such as it has been defined by Hans-Georg Gadamer for example. Indeed, reading implies for the German philosopher a succession of adjustments and an enlargement of the consciousness through a fusion of horizons: *Horizontverschmelzung*.[13] This reading procedure has of course to do with Wegg's reduction of the text's otherness to fit into his narrow mindset.

Through Podsnappery Dickens also takes issue with intellectual narrow-mindedness and unimaginative fiction. Interestingly, the invention of Podsnap, the character, and of Podsnappery, the concept attached to it, i. e. philistinism, originates at least partly in literary rivalry. The model for the smug bourgeois being none other than John Forster himself. The satirical intention behind the creation of Podsnap is of course self-evident but what should be noted is that chapter XI, Book 1, that is fully dedicated to Podsnappery, is highly self-referential in the postmodernist sense of the term.[14] It is fiction commenting on fiction and, in so doing, reducing the ontological gap between the story proper and the metafictional comments. Podsnap, who is prone to hold forth pompously on any topic, has some deep-seated convictions on what the Arts should be all about. His approach is purely mimetic, normative and restrictive. What he calls "Literature, large print," should confine itself to recording a day in the life of those whom are referred to today as nine-to-fivers: "respectfully descriptive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter-past, breakfasting at nine, going to the city at ten, coming home at half-past-five, and dining at seven" (*OMF*, p. 132). In the course of the chapter, the narrator shows that this pre-determined grid drastically reducing the scope of what is eligible for fiction, and more widely the Arts, operates within the salons of the Podsnaps amongst the guests themselves. Like automata, the sophisticated members of high, fashionable society act according to the prototypical script which Podsnap has shortly presented as the model for fiction. Through intratextual repetitions within a sole chapter, the narrator renders tangible and palpable what theoreticians like John Barth, in

13 Gadamer, Hans Georg (2006), *Truth and Method,* London: Continuum, p. 304, p. 336, p. 366, p. 389.

14 Hutcheon, Linda (1988), *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, New York: Routledge and Waugh, Patricia (1992), *Practising Postmodernism and Reading Modernism*, London / New York: Edward Arnold.

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'The Literature of Exhaustion,'[15] for example, have shown as the postmodern condition. Indeed, Podsnap's discourse on fiction: "respectfully descriptive of getting up at eight […]" and so forth is followed towards the end of the chapter by some of the distinguished guests slavishly replicating this lamentable plotline: "[S]ixteen disciples of Podsnappery went through the figures of – 1, Getting up eight and shaving close at a quarter past – 2, Breakfasting at nine – 3, Going to the city at ten – 4, Coming home at half-past-five – 5, Dining at seven, and the grand chain" (*OMF*, p. 141). Not only does Dickens transpose into his fiction arguments that he was developing elsewhere, notably in *All the Year Round*, to make fun of 'The Legitimate Novel'[16] but, within the space of the novel itself, he shows the vicious circle of intellectual impoverishment prevailing between life and fiction, and to drive the point home, he deliberately impoverishes his own text. The second time round the plotline is not presented by means of a syntactically structured paragraph with neatly coordinated clauses, but merely as a list of disjointed items.

In *Our Mutual Friend,* Dickens extends his investigation of reading to include other forms of writing than literature. He shows both his awareness of, and concern about, the spread of the written medium to embrace all aspects of life, notably through the rise of advertising: "They ain't Pills, or Hair-Washes, or Invigorating Nervous Essences, to be puffed in that way!" (*OMF*, p. 383). In some cases, reading may prove a most disheartening experience. The new Miss John Rokesmith, who as Miss Bella Wilfer never cared much about household duties, learns cooking through "a sage volume entitled The Complete British Family Housewife" (*OMF*, p. 666), which among other sources – of which there were many at the time – may have been inspired to Dickens by Mrs Beeton's immensely successful *Book on Household Management* (1861). The cooking book's prose is confused and to Bella the Britishness advertised on the cover is no guarantee of the intelligibility of much of what is written: "The Complete British Housewife, however sound a Briton at heart, was by no means an expert Briton at expressing herself with clearness in the British tongue, and sometimes might have issued her directions to equal purpose in the Kamskatchan language" (*OMF*, p. 666), which may of course be in retrospect construed as a dig at Podsnappery. Bella, in her vain attempts at making sense of the recipes, is described in a way reminiscent of reader-response theory. She opposes her own text of protest to the British Housewife's own text through exclamations that are parodically qualified as marginal notes. Indeed, Bella's side-comments, as she articulates her perplexity, are like scribbling added to the margins of the Complete British Family Housewife. The narrator thus records Bella's dialogic

15 Barth, John (1967), 'The Literature of Exhaustion' *The Atlantic Monthly* 220, pp. 29 – 34.
16 Cotsell (1986), pp. 92 – 5.

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response to the riddling document as if a countertext were being appended to the original, "'Oh you ridiculous old thing, what do you mean by that? You must have been drinking!' And *having made this marginal note*, would try the housewife again" (*OMF*, p. 666). Besides, the book's enunciation and especially its constant use of imperatives: "Take a salamander, as if a general should command a private to catch a tartar" (*OMF*, p. 666) both incense Bella and largely participate in degrading the reading experience.

In his concern for the reception of all kinds of printed texts, Dickens mentions newspapers. It is now well-known through the genesis of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* that papers lend themselves to being read aloud, or rather done in different voices, especially where police news are concerned (*OMF*, pp. 198 and 764). Newspaper articles are also shown as being singularly devoid of substantial content. Bella only goes through the motions of reading out the papers to John Rokesmith just for the moment of shared intimacy that such occasions afford. It is of course no coincidence that Dickens, who set great store by public reading till the end of his life, should insist upon the theatrical possibilities offered by newspapers, however trivial their content. This may be his way of turning reading into something special at a time when, as a result of the proliferation of textual material, reading was sometimes underrated and possibly desecrated. Yet, the Golden Dustman's textual greed tends to suggest a completely different picture.

It is probably through his treatment of the Golden Dustman's literary cannibalism that Dickens goes the furthest in denouncing the perversions that may be induced by reading. Nicodemus Boffin, "the bookworm and minion of fortune," can only think of the activity of reading in terms of his own professional activities as dust heap keeper: "It's too late for me to keep sifting and shovelling at alphabeds and grammar books" (*OMF*, p. 58). Likewise, just as it is the sheer bulk of the rubbish mounds that account for the wealth they may hold, Boffin cannot think of reading regardless of quantitative and pecuniary considerations; he bulk-purchases books, preferably at bargain prices. His confusion about Gibbon's title "Decline-and-Fall-off-the-Rooshan-Empir" (*OMF*, p. 59) is telltale of a time when the potential devastating effects of the Crimean crisis on international trade were on the minds of all businessmen. The literary is thus contaminated by the mercenary.

Furthermore, Silas Wegg and Nicomedus Boffin make up a strange literary partnership by feigning to deliberately forget the distinction between the real world and its representation through writing. As it turns out, the dustman naturalises the Roman Generals by drawing them into his own experiential world, calling Belisarius Bully Sawyers for example, as if the latter had no more historical status than the man next door. And to Boffin, the record of historical data is merely the extension of his own present so that he expects the decline and

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fall of the Roman Empire to impinge upon his own life at each reading session. Incidentally, this pragmatic perception of reading, whereby texts must necessarily have some immediate, practical effect on real life, will stand him in good stead in his plan to have Bella believe him to have turned into a despicably avaricious man. It is by having Bella read out books relating the lives of misers to him that he manipulates her into thinking that he is one such obnoxious scrooge himself. Wegg, for his part, willfully joins in the metaleptic game consisting of constantly erasing the boundary lines between diegetic levels because he has his own axe to grind. Thus the historical past recounted in Gibbon's works ends up making up the daily routine of Boffin's new life: "The Roman Empire having worked out its destruction, Mr Boffin next appeared in a cab with Rollin's Ancient History" (*OMF*, p. 470) and when "[t]he wars of the Jews […] languish under Mr Wegg's generalship, Mr Boffin arrives […] in another cab with Plutarch" (*OMF*, p. 470). In typically postmodernist fashion, Boffin's world has become indistinguishable from the textualised one he is immersed in. This of course leads to his being caught up in "severe literary difficulties" (*OMF*, p. 180), in which literary does not only refer to his being illiterate, but more profoundly, to the more existential difficulty of grappling with the issue of credibility in literature, or written history: "What to believe in, in the course of his reading was Mr Boffin's chief literary difficulty indeed" (*OMF*, p. 470). In the last resort, Boffin's aporia: "That stumbling block he never got over" (*OMF*, p. 470) is perfectly apposite to a novel like *Our Mutual Friend*, whose proto-postmodernity resides in its insistence upon the flimsiness and the vacuity of the real in a world permeated by signs.

2. The World as Text – the Vacuity of the Real

Our Mutual Friend opens on an overt rejection of any precise temporal landmark. The over-presence of an undetermined present is posited as early as the opening lines: "In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise […]" (*OMF*, p. 13). Such blunt assertion of the contemporaneous is in sharp contrast with the beginnings of many Dickensian novels adopting a retrospective stance. It would seem that the time in *Our Mutual Friend* anticipates the time of postmodernity, whose chief characteristic lies, according to Frederic Jameson, in the loss of any substantial relation to the past. This is of course more than amply confirmed by the aptly named Veneerings in their "bran-new" house in Stucconia. The choice of the patronymic epitomises both ontological void and the omnipresence of surfaces erasing any ties to the past. As John R. Reed has pointed out in a recent study titled *Dickens's Hyperrealism* surfaceness and superficiality extend to books themselves when

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Charley Hexam's attention is caught by "bran-new books, in bran-new bindings, liberally gilded" (*OMF*, p. 27). Curiously, the all-pervasive insistence on surfaces feeds the contrary urge to find out what may be hidden below or behind covers: "he glanced at the backs of the books, with an awakened curiosity that went below the binding" (*OMF*, p. 28). To take up Reed's analysis "a telling connection of the surface/depth theme with that of interpreting signs and that of narration"[17] is tantalisingly established. Now this legitimate curiosity is unfortunately likely to remain unsatisfied because the world of *Our Mutual Friend* is often deprived of depth.

This observation of the absence of a tangible reality or substance concealed behind the façade of signs suggests unparalleled, and apparently anachronistic, correspondences between the Inimitable's fiction on the one hand, and Jean Baudrillard's and Jean-François Lyotard's repective definitions of postmodernism on the other hand. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard[18] argues that the postmodern world is one in which there is no longer any referential being or matter behind abstraction or simulation. The map, the double or the mirror, do not stand in for a more tangible reality, they are *the* reality, or better said hyperreality, in other words a real devoid of origins. To illustrate this absence of a concrete, palpable reality behind signs or representation, Baudrillard uses the image of the desert of the real, which of course may be found in *Our Mutual Friend:* "a tract of suburban Sahara" (*OMF*, p. 42) or Wegg's stall being as "dry as the desert" (*OMF*, p. 53), and in lots of other instances evoking dust. Even more strikingly, Dickens gives a convincing illustration of what Baudrillard calls the precession of simulacra, i. e. the fact that, as he put it in his epigraph, which is itself an extrapolation from *Ecclesiastes:* "the simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulation is true."[19] In 'The Man from Somewhere,' the novel's second chapter, the mirror does not so much reflect an external reality as it multiplies effects of specular illusions or delusions. The long description of the Veneerings' salons with the towering presence of the "great looking glass above the sideboard" is paradigmatic of the effacement of solid, tangible matter giving way to a kaleidoscopic montage of fleeting images cancelling each other out, caught as they are in a visual vertigo. The anaphoric use of the verb 'reflect,' heading no fewer than nine sentences, makes of the succession of specular reflections the paragraph's linchpin. The reflected guests whirl away in this vortex of mirrored images before spiraling into absence one after the other. The precedence of the intangible through the anamorphic shapes of the silhouettes only perceptible

17 Reed, John R. (2010), *Dickens's Hyperrealism*, Columbus / OH: The Ohio State UP, p. 92.
18 Baudrillard, Jean (2006), *Simulacra and Simulation*, Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P.
19 Baudrillard (2006), p. 1.

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through the mirror is sealed thanks to the paragraph's chiasmic pattern opening and closing on the ubiquitous aforementioned mirror. Moreover, the effacement of any referential anchorage is further conjured up when the looking glass is said to mirror a sign, or rather insignia, in other words, a semiotic entity: "Reflects the new Veneering crest, in gold and eke in silver, frosted and also thawed, a camel of all work" (*OMF*, p. 21).

Dickens adumbrates topics which were to be scientifically conceptualised in the postmodern age. A good instance would be the way in which he treats of the potential theatricality inherent in social interaction. In the late twentieth century, Erving Goffman's sociology has been read as a semiotics of postmodern culture[20] because among subjects of interest he regards human actions on the public scene as a series of theatrical performances. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the narrator as observer, the so-called "eyes of this history" (*OMF*, p. 417) records the characters' behaviour as signs open for interpretation whilst public spaces are envisaged as dramaturgical stages. This narratorial stance allows for a shift from the Shakepearean *Theatrum Mundi* topos, and from other theatrical readings of Dickens that have come out ever since Robert Garis's publication of *The Dickens Theatre: A Reassessment of the Novels* in 1965.[21] Not only does Dickens allude to the introduction of display windows showcasing riches, when he mentions that the drug house of Chicksey and Stobbles "had become absorbed in Veneering […] who had signalized his accession to supreme power by bringing into the business a quantity of plate-glass window" (*OMF*, p. 41) but he also turns the street into a theatrical venue in anticipation of what Debord much later called "the society of the spectacle."[22] In Book III, Chapter V, the narrator shows how Mr and Mrs Boffin having come into the late John Harmon's fortune enjoy the new delights of what has since become the consumer society. They marvel at "the variety and […] beauty of the displays in the windows, which seemed incapable of exhaustion" (*OMF*, p. 461). They also willfully endorse the parts that have been assigned to them in the great social game in which they are now actors: "As if the principal streets were a great Theatre and the play childishly new to them" (*OMF*, p. 461). In a way, the Golden Dustman and his spouse already testify to what was to become the post-modern condition, marked by a rupture between an action and its sociological significance. Their street perambulation, for the purpose of shop-browsing, may be seen in Goffmanian terminology as a social ritual, even if only the narrator is conscious of this possible split between doing and the symbolical meaning of doing.

20 Vester, Heinz-Günter (1989), 'Erving Goffman's Sociology as a Semiotics of Postmodern Culture' *Semiotica* 76, pp. 191 – 203.

21 Garis, Robert (1965), *The Dickens Theatre: A Reassessment of the Novels*, Oxford: Oxford UP.

22 Debord, Guy (1994), *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York: Zone Books.

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The possibility of a break between action and the reflection on the action's meaning entails a form of dissociation of the self ultimately turning the characters into signs that have to be interpreted. Characters may be a closed book, or a text calling for hermeneutics. This significant departure from an essentialist approach to characterisation, which betrays a typically postmodern mindframe, is perceptible on a few occasions. In Book Three, Chapter X, Eugene Wrayburn expatiates on the range of acceptations which the verb 'reading' covers, roughly from perceiving to interpreting and representing:

> You charm me, Mortimer, with your reading of my weaknesses (By-the-by, that very word, Reading, in its critical use, always charms me […] a singer's Reading of a song, a marine-painter's Reading of the sea, the Kettle-drum's Reading of an instrumental passage, are phrases ever youthful and delightful…). (*OMF*, p. 532)

Eugene's remark set in parentheses is meta-artistic and underscores the self-referential nature of a novel largely engaged with semiotics. This emphasis on reading as an experiential and phenomenological way of relating to reality points to a level of abstractedness which has become the new order of the day. This readerly universe bestows a form of *enigmaticity* upon characters who, first, appeared fairly straightforward, before turning into some forms of hieroglyphs. This is obviously the case of Boffin, whom Bella, a compulsive reader herself, describes as a literary crux which she finds difficult to decipher: "A kind of illegibility though a different kind, stole over Mr Boffin's face" (*OMF*, p. 467). Interestingly, meaning is deferred whilst characters are shown as replicating texts. Bella is so used to reading that she ends up seeing in Boffin a potential challenge to her interpretative skills and the best way she finds to approximate some kind of truth regarding this character is to consider the flesh and bones dustman as the living embodiment of all the misers that are found in the books they have purchased together. Within this reading loop there seems to be no room left for any direct apprehension of reality: "His very smile was cunning, as if he had been studying smiles among the portraits of his misers" (*OMF*, p. 119).

Dickens even goes one step further in emptying reality of its substance, or matter, through the fiction of the Lammles – a fiction within a fiction invested with a higher degree of fictionality than the novel in which it is set. The Lammles are a couple formed on a bond of mutual deception. From the outset, their partnership is founded on a spurious marriage contract. Alfred Lammle Esquire marries Sophronia Akersham whom he takes for a rich heiress and the latter marries just for the same reason. It soon turns out that both husband and wife are penniless crooks who have trapped each other. Dickens suggests an interesting parallel between traffic in shares and counterfeit marriages, as both bear witness to the destructive power of fiction in a world where, to quote Hillis Miller, "the collective hallucination of an existence prevails where nothing ex-

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ists."[23] The Lammles belong to the host of characters who "become infested with the Veneering fiction" (*OMF*, p. 119) in which Veneering is both a patronym and an adjective synonymous with 'shallow' and 'meretricious.' Dickens by later depicting the two Lammles as rapacious primates leaving footprints on the sandy beach of the Isle of Wight, "the lady has prodded little spirting holes in the damp sand […] and the gentleman has trailed a stick after him. As if he were of the Mephistopheles family indeed, and had walked with a drooping tail" (*OMF*, p. 125) may suggest that in a world of sophisticated semiotics, they have both committed an act of crass misreading and that the crude marks they leave in their wake are proof of their primitive literacy. Their desire to cut down the world to their own fiction ultimately rebounds on them by confronting them to the hard, incontrovertible fact of their impecunious condition.

Dickens goes to great lengths to call up the fictionality of the Lammles' existence and by extension to point to the life-denying character of their fabricated fiction as a lethal substitute for a more tangible existence. The charade of a life in the lap of luxury is fed by the collective rumour around the Lammles' palatial residence. Due to their insolvent state, they cannot afford a costly dwelling of their own but nonetheless succeed in entertaining the fiction that no residence is good enough for them. So, ultimately, through a typically Dickensian reversal of logic, turning good common sense on its head, the Lammles' non-existent place of abode becomes a matter of envy to everyone who is dissatisfied with their own houses: "many persons of their acquaintance becoming by anticipation dissatisfied of their own houses, and envious of the non-existent Lammle structure" (*OMF*, p. 481). The fiction of the Lammles' improbable house has become everyone's reality, the yardstick by which they assess the rate of their own dissatisfaction. To return to Baudrillard extrapolating from the *Ecclesiastes* the simulacrum is the only true reality.

Lyotard's definition of the postmodern selects a different angle by prioritising the epistemological side, through what he calls the collapse of metanarratives, i. e. narratives bearing witness to the West's reliance on ideologies upholding universal truths – Humanism, History, Religion and Progress. To the totalitarianism of grand narratives Lyotard opposes the plurality of competing small narratives, or language games – a term borrowed from Wittgenstein – deprived of any overarching structure.[24] Precisely, the fragmentariness of *Our Mutual Friend*, a novel following different plotlines simultaneously, and shifting abruptly from one to another, prevents it from qualifying as metanarrative.

23 Hillis Miller, J. (1996), 'Our Mutual Friend' *Charles Dickens Critical Assessments*, ed. Michael Hollington, vol. 3, Mountjoy: Helm Information, pp. 169 – 77, p. 172.

24 Lyotard, Jean-François (1984), *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.

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Indeed, this fiction is not ruled by one single, fully consistent consciousness bent on structuring its progress from clearly signposted guidelines. Not only does it offer a whole range of different perspectives, but through its "serpentining" (*OMF*, p. 481) path it also eschews any fixed unidirectional drive. It is also singularly devoid of the impetus that could gather up its different threads into a centripetal, unified whole. From many respects, it is an entropic fiction replicating through its fragmentariness the miscellaneous assortment of discarded objects which it repeatedly alludes to. Eugene Wrayburn who is naturally prone to *acedia* articulates this downright rejection of structuring energy: "'Then idiots talk,' said Eugene […] 'of Energy. If there is a word in the dictionary under any letter from A to Z that I abominate, it is Energy'" (*OMF*, p. 30). Precisely, the lack of energy is bound to result in a plethoric redundancy of details not "resolvable in anything distinct" (*OMF*, p. 83) similar to the muddle of objects in Mr Venus's shop. At the narrative level, an equivalent for this composite assembly of various artifacts could be found in the many historical records that Boffin pays Wegg to read aloud to him.

It is a well-known fact that postmodernism takes issue with the type of historiography propounding a monological, tightly structured and supposedly neutral record of the past. Dickens, by inscribing within his fiction various historians like Plutarch, Gibbon but also lesser known ones such as Merryweather, Caulfield and Wilson, not only contributes to disclaiming the possibility of any single, all-encompassing vision of history but also allows its constructedness, through telling, relayed by reading sessions, to come to the fore. Furthermore, through his monomaniacal infatuation with misers, Boffin pushes Dickens to investigate maverick historical records and thus to turn away from the more enlightened, progressive history championed by Macaulay and his followers.

3. The Redemption of Reading

In this last part, it will be argued that there is in *Our Mutual Friend* a romantic treatment of reading which does not call into question the proto-postmodernist trend which has been explored so far. Indeed, a number of scholars like Alan Liu, John McGowan and the previously-mentioned Clayton, have argued that in their definitions of postmodernism philosophers like Baudrillard, Lyotard and Foucault repeatedly insisted on the fact that this late-twentieth-century cultural trend constantly flaunted its total rejection of the grand Enlightenment metanarratives of rationality and progress. To quote Alan Liu, this return to the eighteenth-century philosophy of progress, from the perspective of the late twentieth century, would be a typical case of amnesia, which "aggressively

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sublated romanticism."[25] This blatant instance of oblivion is all the more striking as the links between Romanticism and Postmodernism are not difficult to track down. "[C]ounter Enlightenment attitudes such as an opposition to the hegemony of sight, a critical attitude towards instrumental reason, a preference for undisciplined modes of inquiry […] and a reliance on self-reflexive modes of thought"[26] could apply indiscriminately to the Romantics and the Postmodernists. It can be shown that in *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens propounds a Romantic vision of sublimated reading which challenges, or better transgresses, the analytical frames posited by more cognitive-oriented poetics of reading. Dickens would thus revive from within his novel, playing up the motif of resurrectionism, the occluded link between Romanticism and Postmodernism.

As in many of his novels, Dickens makes of education a crucial topic in *Our Mutual Friend*. However, mechanically storing indiscriminate knowledge is denounced through the character of Bradley Headstone, "the highly certificated, stipendiary schoolmaster" (*OMF*, pp. 216 – 17). To the plodding, short-sighted method of reading, consisting in laboriously stumbling through printed texts, whilst remaining "absolutely ignorant of the sublime history" (*OMF*, p. 216) Dickens prefers the power of visionary imagination aroused by chimerical books. Two characters partake of the visionary realm affording insightful paths to readerly creativity: Jenny Wren, the doll's dressmaker and her friend Lizzie Hexam. Lizzie who has never been taught to read and write is nonetheless endowed with an intuitive bond with supernatural literature as her brother Charley remarks: "You said you couldn't read a book, Lizzie. Your library of books is the hollow down by the flare I think" (*OMF*, p. 39). In several other passages, the fire burning in the Hexams' dilapidated hovel is shown as Lizzie's library (*OMF*, pp. 236 and 669). The woman is said to read in or into live coals for example. Dickens anticipates Bachelard's *Psychoanalysis of Fire* and evolves a poetics of the reading sublime. For the French philosopher, fire is conducive to a fertile, archaic reverie: "it is the point of departure […] to set free the lively dialectics which bestow on reverie its true liberty and its true function as a creative mental process."[27] The moments when Lizzie gaze at the burning flames, or glowing embers, are characterised both by "the rapture and rupture"[28] which reading entails. In this romantic sublimation of the act of reading only the aesthetic side, in the Iserian acceptation, is present as books are only virtually called up through metaphoric extrapolation. Thanks to this image of the reader

25 Liu, Alan (1990), 'Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism, and the Romanticism of Detail' *Representations* 32, pp. 75 – 113, p. 89.

26 Clayton, Jay (2003), p. 7.

27 Bachelard, Gaston (1964), *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Boston: Beacon Press Books, p. 112.

28 Alsop, Derek and Chris Walsh, (1999), *The Practice of Reading. Interpreting the Novel*, Houndmills: Macmillan P, p. 2.

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as a fire gazer Dickens may be said to hoist the figure of what Eco calls *Lector in Fabula* to the rank of demiurge as *Creator in Fabula*.

In a pioneering article devoted to Dickens and the genealogy of postmodernism, Jay Clayton put forward a decisive argument:

> Identifying Dickens's postmodernity may help us see our own period differently. We must recognize that postmodernism is not the dawning of a new age but the realization of certain possibilities within Western society that were salient even in the time of Charles Dickens.[29]

Drawing on Michel Foucault's philosophical approach,[30] genealogy does not aim at postulating a linear, progressive and teleological movement of history but rather at underscoring lines of continuity amidst breaks and ruptures. Dickens is by no means postmodernist, and this essay does not intend to disqualify insightful interpretations of the novel as evincing a (pre-)modernist sensibility. What the emphasis on reading and textuality permits to underscore though, is how *Our Mutual Friend*, through its all-absorbing concern with signs and deciphering in a sterile world, betrays metafictional preoccupations whilst adumbrating many topics that were later to constitute the main features of postmodernism: the world as simulacrum, the dissociation of the Self precluding essentialist identity, the rituals of social interaction in a Goffmanian perspective and a plural approach to History fraught with parodic overtones.

Surely Dickens was highly conscious of the odd, recondite patterns of (inter) connection between fiction and life that was to become one of the hallmarks of postmodernism: "There is sometimes an odd disposition in this country to dispute as improbable in fiction, what are the commonest experiences of fact" (*OMF*, p. 798). If anything, Dickens established the fictionality inherent in his day and age through a self-conscious, and at times self-referential narrative – a text flaunting its immersion in textuality.

29 Clayton, Jay (1991) 'Dickens and the Genealogy of Postmodernism' *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46, pp. 181 – 95, p. 195.

30 Foucault, Michel (1980), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 – 1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books.

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3. Dickens as a Reader of Contemporary Literature

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Rolf Lessenich (Bonn)

3.1 Edward Bulwer-Lytton as a Reader of Charles Dickens

Lord Byron's death in 1824 caused a real shock, fostering the notion of a sudden cultural watershed in the minds of many English intellectuals. The young Tennyson carved the mournful lines 'Byron is dead' upon a rock, and Edward Bulwer retrospectively diagnosed 1824 as the year of the death of solipsistic, oneiric, and morbid Romanticism, as well as being the beginning of a new age of practical commitment:

> When Byron passed away, the feeling he had represented craved utterance no more. With a sigh we turned to the actual and practical career of life: we awoke from the morbid, the passionate, the dreaming, 'the moonlight and the dimness of the mind,' and by a natural reaction addressed ourselves to the active and daily objects which lay before us […] Hence that strong attachment to the Practical, which became so visible a little time after the death of Byron, and which continues [….] to characterize the temper of the time.[1]

Pelham (1828), Bulwer's first successful novel, features an eponymous hero who mirrored Bulwer's own progression from Romantic Byronism to Victorianism. Many of Bulwer's *bildungsroman* protagonists then moved from egoism to some sort of social service in Pelham's wake: Algernon Mordaunt in *The Disowned*, Percy Godolphin, Ernest Maltravers, and Kenelm Chillingly. The artist Godolphin, for instance, must learn to abstain from romantic indulgences, to leave 'the haunts of the Nymph' and enter the real battle of life without, however, betraying his ideals.[2] Following Thomas Carlyle's *Characteristics* of 1831, the converted Bulwer nevertheless warned against a return to the Age of Enlightenment. He pleaded against "the unenobling materialism of Locke" and was

1 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward (1970), *England and the English*, ed. Standish Meacham, Chicago / London: U of Chicago P, p. 286. See also Newey, Vincent (2008), 'Rival Cultures: Charles Dickens and the Byronic Legacy' *Romantic Echoes in the Victorian Era*, ed. Andrew Radford / Mark Sandy, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 67 – 83.

2 Christensen, Allan Conrad (1976), *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions*, Athens / GA: U of Georgia P, pp. 75 – 111. Christensen here quotes *Godolphin*, chapter 31.

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staunchly in favour of a return to a morality and art based on religion: "Religion wanes from a nation, as poetry vanishes from religion."[3]

England and the English, from which these quotations are taken, was published in 1833, the year in which Charles Dickens began to publish his *Sketches by Boz* (beginning in December 1833). By that time, Bulwer had already produced his first and only unsuccessful novel, *Falkland* (1827), one that sold badly due to its backward-oriented Godwinian message, and seven very successful novels: *Pelham* (1828), *The Disowned* (1828), *Devereux* (1829), *Paul Clifford* (1830), *Eugene Aram* (1832), and *Godolphin* (1833), along with several volumes of poetry. The first were fashionable silver-fork novels, transgressive of the model of their Toryistic equivalents by Theodore Edward Hook insofar as they introduced the theme of crime by bringing seemingly respectable high society into contact with low society, making each the other's mirror. They were followed by Newgate novels, analysing the causes of crime for which high society was responsible in terms of social and legal injustice via "a vicious Prison Discipline, and a sanguinary Penal Code."[4] According to the testimony of Bulwer's son and first biographer Robert, it was using the model of such 'tendency novels' as *Paul Clifford* that Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* (1838), a novel that, following *Paul Clifford*, used dialect and cant for the delineation of characters and their social spheres.[5] These novels, conspicuously aimed at social improvement, revealed the two sides of Victorian society, Benjamin Disraeli's 'two nations,' establishing a *doppelgänger* dichotomy that informed the two first chapters of Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864 – 65); the sick world of the criminal Rogue Riderhood that darkly mirrored the strangely complementary sick world of the silver-fork Veneerings.[6] Following William Godwin, highly esteemed by the young Bulwer, social ills in need of cure have their share in the formation of criminals in the novels of both Bulwer and Dickens.[7] This is why, in the Victorian debate about the relative merits of Rembrandt's Dutch and Raphael's Italian school of painting, both novelists adhered to the preference for Raphael: art should not

3 Bulwer-Lytton (1970), p. 186. See also Göbel, Walter (1993), *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: Systemreferenz, Funktion, literarischer Wert in seinem Erzählwerk*, Heidelberg: Winter, p. 182.

4 Bulwer-Lytton, Robert (1883), *The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, London: Kegan Paul, II, p. 241.

5 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward (1868), *Paul Clifford*, *Novels and Tales. A New Edition in Eleven Volumes*, London / New York: George Routledge and Sons, X, pp. 1 – 5, and compare with the Artful Dodger's Cockney cant in *Oliver Twist*.

6 Cronin, Richard (2004), 'Bulwer, Carlyle, and the Fashionable Novel' *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton*, ed. Allan Conrad Christensen, Newark / DE: U of Delaware P, pp. 50 – 51.

7 Worthington, Heather (2004), 'Against the Law: Bulwer's Fictions of Crime' *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton*, ed. Allan Conrad Christensen, Newark / DE: U of Delaware P, pp. 54 – 67; Childers, Joseph W. (2002), 'Victorian Theories of the Novel' *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Patrick Brantlinger / William B. Thesing, Malden / MA / Oxford: Wiley, pp. 408 – 10.

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merely represent drab reality, but also provide an ideal with a perspective of improvement.[8]

Bulwer's diagnosis of the death of Byronic Romanticism and the rise of the Victorian cult of practical altruistic commitment, which should be based on and propagated by a non-dogmatic religion of humanity counteracting doubt, fits in with the views and values propagated in Dickens's novels from *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) through to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). This included Bulwer's conviction, which found a much-quoted formulation in his historical verse drama *Richelieu* (1839), that "[t]he pen is mightier than the sword"[9] and novel-writing an artist's duty to inform his countrymen. Both Bulwer and Dickens were upset about hostile reviews accusing them of hyping their novels for mere profit. In their view, high-quality novels of social criticism required and served a large audience. Dickens's ambition to emulate Bulwer as the best-selling English novelist proved more than successful – during his lifetime, Bulwer was outsold by his early disciple and later collaborator, and only Dickens was more frequently translated.[10]

In Bulwer, born in 1803, the younger Dickens, born in 1812, found a committed Radical Whig MP (1831 to 1833) who advocated political, legal, and penal reform and sought to address a wide readership with a mixture of the realistic novel and imaginative romance.[11] Bulwer, the young Radical novelist, was scathingly criticised for his transgression of conventional political and literary norms in the leading Tory periodicals of the day – the *Quarterly Review* and *Fraser's Magazine*. Later, around 1850, Bulwer turned to the caring conservatism of another convert from Radicalism to Toryism, his lifelong friend Benjamin Disraeli, as head of the Young England Tories, sharing their denigration of free trade and popular culture, a *volte face* that Dickens did not follow.[12] Nor would he emulate Bulwer's aristocratic parading of his classical education in his novels, although he had learned Latin at Wellington House Academy for boys (1824 – 27).[13] He found popular culture, Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821 – 1828) featuring Tom and Jerry, more congenial than John Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* (1788).[14] Learned references to classical myths and the classical tradition, as to the legend of Evander and Euphrasia in book 1 chapter 19 of *Little*

8 Christensen (2004), p. 77.
9 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward (1860), *Richelieu, or, the Conspiracy*, act II, scene 2, *Dramatic Works*, Copyright Edition, Leipzig: Tauchnitz, p. 53.
10 Brown, Andrew, 'Edward Bulwer-Lytton' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online version.
11 Mitchell, Leslie (2003), *Bulwer Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*, London / New York: Hambledon & London, pp. 173 – 74.
12 In 1852, Bulwer re-entered parliament as a Tory.
13 Hibbert, Christopher (1967), *The Making of Charles Dickens*, London: Longman, pp. 83 – 94.
14 John, Juliet (2010), *Dickens and Mass Culture*, Oxford: Oxford UP, passim.

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Dorrit (1855 – 57), are rare, although do increase in his later, more demanding novels. As a classical scholar, the novelist George Gissing overshot the mark when he attributed Dickens's unmerciful jibes at classical learning exclusively to his regret of his inadequate education.[15] Dickens also disapproved of Bulwer's increasingly aristocratic affectation of the exotic in his dress and habits, which tended to isolate him in Victorian society.[16] But Bulwer's as well as Dickens's novels retained their strong elements of popular romance and melodrama. In the preface to his historical novel *The Last of the Barons* (1843), Bulwer declared that his fiction aimed at "something higher than mere romance," the realism of well-researched historical facts as well as inventions based on "general knowledge of mankind" and the "philosophy of the human heart."[17] Or, as he put it in a preface added in the revolutionary year of 1848, he had to face "that great reality – the People."[18] Writing novels of social criticism, in which he probed deep into the causes of poverty, crime and their relation, Bulwer could not possibly have adhered to pure romance. He had to straddle the divide between the representation of a well-designed and benevolent universe on the one hand and the representation of the daily experience of appalling injustice on the other – an acrobatic act most obvious in *Eugene Aram*. Dickens tried to reconcile this contradiction by opposing a secularised concept of individual biblical love and charity as a possible means of romance-like individual salvation to the general contingencies of life and the general corruption of society. Thus, the feeding of the prisoners by the Marseilles prison-keeper's little daughter at the beginning of *Little Dorrit* ('Book the First: Poverty') adumbrates the salvation of the hero by the child-like titular heroine in the Marshalsea prison at the novel's end ('Book the Second: Riches'). The child saviour, whose bright eyes shed the light of hope into the darkness of an adult world – taken from Wordsworth's *Intimations Ode* (*MS* 1804, 1806) – reappears in Bulwer's *A Strange Story* (1862), with numerous intertextual references to Wordsworth. Expressed in dialectical Wordsworthian terms, 'despondency' as the antithesis to the thesis of paradisiacal innocence is followed by the synthesis of 'despondency corrected.'[19] Echoing a motif from Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), two innocent small girls with a common Christian name suggesting love (Amy Dorrit and Amy Lloyd) take care of

15 Korg, Jacob (1963), *George Gissing: A Critical Biography*, London: Methuen, 1965, pp. 217 – 18; Schlicke, Paul (1985), *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, London: Allen & Unwin, p. 46.

16 Mitchell (2003), p. 89.

17 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward (1868), *The Last of the Barons*, Dedicatory Epistle, *Novels and Tales. A New Edition in Seven Volumes*, London / New York: George Routledge and Sons, III, pp. iii-iv.

18 Christensen (2004), pp. 136 – 69.

19 Wordsworth, William (1814), *The Excursion*, book III 'Despondency', book IV 'Despondency Corrected.' *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson / Ernest de Selincourt, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1936, 1971, pp. 614 – 25, pp. 625 – 41.

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two old men (William Dorrit and Julius Faber), bringing an element of paradise and romance into an adult world disillusioned by experience, touching the heart and softening the emotions.[20] The contrasts between the world of romance and that of the novel, however, indicate their ultimate irreconcilability.[21] Dickens also subscribed to Bulwer's notion of realism tempered by romance, or romance ennobled by realism, when he studied sources for the contemporary and historical backgrounds of his novels with the same intensity as his mentor. The old-fashioned romance survived as a heterogeneous element of the new novel, at least for a number of decades, in the modern age of science and realism. According to the seminal definition of Walter Scott, the novel deals with the "ordinary train of human events," whereas the romance introduces "marvellous and uncommon incidents."[22] In the Victorian Age, romance, with its reliable didactic narrators, its stock black or white characters, its spectacular and sensational nature, and its strong appeal to the passions was more popular than the realistic novel – and akin to popular melodrama. Charlotte Brontë complained to her reviewer George Henry Lewes that novels proper, which eschewed the conventions of romance and melodrama and confined themselves to 'Nature and Truth,' would not sell.[23] Victorian melodrama had parted company with extreme, subversive Gothic drama of the type of Lewis's *Castle Spectre* (1797) and Maturin's *Bertram* (1816) and had become a vehicle for the propagation of traditional moral norms and affirmative world views.[24] Romance and melodrama reassured the reader of metaphysical security in a modern world of doubt and materialism by showing them the workings of a moral universe, in which suffering was purposeful and accident the *deus-ex-machina* dispensation of a benevolent Divine Providence, ultimately rewarding good and punishing evil.[25] It was enormously difficult for Bulwer – and for his reader Dickens – to reconcile the modern novel's complex and multi-layered universe, exposed to ultimately dangerous contingencies defying theodicy, with his overarching construction of the homogeneous and religiously semanticised universe of romance.[26] This is

20 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward (1868), *A Strange Story*, *Novels and Tales. A New Edition in Seven Volumes*, London / New York: George Routledge and Sons, p. 192.

21 Dickens, Charles (2012), *Little Dorrit*, ed. Harvey Peter Sucksmith, Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. vii-viii.

22 Scott, Walter (1972), 'Essay on Romance' *English Theories of the Novel III: 19th Century*, ed. Elke Platz-Waury, Tübingen: Niemeyer, p. 24.

23 Brontë, Charlotte (1995 – 2004), 'Letter to George Henry Lewes' *Letters*, ed. Margaret Smith, Oxford: Clarendon P, I, p. 559.

24 Cox, Jeffrey N. ed. (1992), *Seven Gothic Dramas 1789 – 1825*, Athens / OH: Ohio UP, p. 42.

25 Göbel, Walter (1993),'Edward Bulwer-Lytton' *Britannica et Americana*, vol. 14, Heidelberg: Winter, pp. 49 – 121.

26 Booth, Wayne C. (1961), *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: Chicago UP.

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why, in a number of his narratives, he reintroduced the marvellous of romance as an agent of Divine Providence.

This appealed to Dickens, who, as an admirer of Bulwer's fiction, sought personal acquaintance with his great and successful model. He first met Bulwer in 1834 in the house of another popular novelist, William Harrison Ainsworth – Kensal Lodge on the Harrow road near Willesden.[27] There he also met the novelist Benjamin Disraeli, his later illustrator George Cruikshank, his later friend, the painter Daniel Maclise, and others. Contact and correspondence became frequent. Dickens reviewed the performance of a dramatic enactment of Bulwer's novel *Rienzi* in 1836 favourably,[28] and he sent Bulwer a copy of *Oliver Twist* (1838), illustrated by Cruikshank, to acknowledge his debt to Bulwer's earlier novels.[29] They were both interested in theatrics and staged private performances in Bulwer's feudal Knebworth, gothicised on the model of Strawberry Hill after his mother's death in 1843, and in other places attended by Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and other celebrities. Dickens, who had originally planned to be an actor (and really became an acclaimed, though not professional one), continued playing roles in charity performances and stage adaptations of his novels;[30] and some of Bulwer's popular comedies such as *The Lady of Lyons* (1838, 1841) and *Money* (1840) ran for decades. They raised the Victorian aristocracy of honest work, virtue, and self-sacrifice (Claude Melnotte) over that of birth (Beauséant) and money (Deschapelles). Dickens, just starting out as an author, must have enjoyed and been influenced by their melodramatic plots and their satire on an obsolete aristocracy as well as bourgeois materialism. Throughout his literary work, Dickens shared Bulwer's disdain for "the self-important and moralizing middle class."[31] In Dickens's novels, Puritanism and economic greed are worse prisons than Newgate and the Marshalsea, witnessed in *Little Dorrit* (1855 – 57). In Bulwer's novels and plays, the smugly egoistic nineteenth-century aristocracy of commerce or industry is just as disastrous for the future of Britain as the smugly egoistic aristocracy of birth had proved to be detrimental for the future of France. Altruistic commitment, personally acquired merit, and an ethical conduct of life only would turn lower members of society into true men of quality, as they do the cottager Claude

27 Johnson, Edgar (1952), *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*, Boston / Toronto: Little, Brown and Co, I, pp. 103 – 104.

28 Dickens, Charles (1965 – 2002), 'Letter to Thomas Beard' *Letters*, ed. Graham Storey et al., Oxford: Clarendon P, I, pp. 122 – 23.

29 Dickens, Charles (1965 – 2000), 'Letter to Bulwer-Lytton' *Letters*, ed. Graham Storey et al., I, p. 454.

30 Tomalin, Claire (2011), *Charles Dickens: A Life*, New York: Penguin, pp. 169 – 71.

31 Wilson, Edmund (1997), *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature*, Athens / OH: Ohio UP, p. 26.

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Melnotte and the honest middle-class soldier Damas, whose efficiency and loyalty quickly raise him to the rank of general.

Dickens and Bulwer regularly socialised with each other and had many common friends, among them the actor William Charles Macready and the journalist and drama critic John Forster, who wrote Dickens's first biography and linked his name inseparably with Bulwer's. Their acquaintance warmed and grew into friendship and closer collaboration when, in 1850, the year of their amateur theatricals at Knebworth, they founded the Guild of Literature and Art for the promotion of poor artists, which Bulwer helped to finance from the proceeds of a historical play, *Not So Bad as We Seem*, that he (with the help of Dickens) wrote for a royal command performance in 1851, in which Dickens also acted to the delight of Queen Victoria.[32] Both took it for granted that, as social reformers, artists stood in need of protection.[33] Bulwer organised Dickens's farewell banquet in Freemasons' Hall before his departure for a second American reading tour, the two men entering arm in arm to the tune of a march played by the Grenadier Guards.[34] Their common view of the social role of literature and their common desire for literary fame and profit united these so very diverse literati as well as their common domestic troubles.

The two authors, who thus paraded their collaboration and friendship even to the social elite least inclined to read their works, also shared an interest in esoteric practices. Bulwer was a Rosicrucian, a Grand Patron of the Order – his crystal ball still on display at Knebworth – and had a strong interest in Mesmerism and electric brain-waves, witnessed in the narrator's attempted natural explanation of seemingly supernatural phenomena in *The Haunted and the Haunters* (1857). Dickens was also an advocate of the esoteric movement and friend of Dr John Elliotson. The work of Franz Anton Mesmer can be seen as a precursor of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, and Mesmerism has been shown to shape Dickens's character delineation.[35] Dickens invited Bulwer to contribute an esoteric romance, *A Strange Story* (1862), the third narrative of magic after *Zanoni* (1842), for serial publication in *All the Year Round* immediately after *Great Expectations*, suggesting corrections. In turn, Bulwer suggested a more romance-like ending to *Great Expectations* (1862) that came closer to the pious romance ending of his *Strange Story:* Pip and Estella are happily married instead of remaining estranged, just as Allen Fenwick lives to see the recovery of his dying wife Lilian.

His new ending and admission of belief in the supernatural in his periodicals

32 Wilson (1997), p. 231, pp. 233 – 36.
33 Mitchell (2003), p. 110.
34 Tomalin (2011), p. 364.
35 Kaplan, Fred (1975), *Dickens and Mesmerism: The Hidden Springs of Fiction*, Princeton / NJ: Princeton UP, pp. 112 – 13.

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and narratives highlight what Dickens found exemplary in and learned from Bulwer's fiction, although he never made such weird use of the supernatural as Bulwer in *The Haunted and the Haunters* (1857) and *A Strange Story,* Bulwer's recourse to romance and melodrama. These facets sold so well because, like the Victorian neo-Gothic, they invented an idealised past, using it to correct a debased present. Romance and melodrama were nostalgic constructions, healthy and just poetic worlds of the past pitted against the modern experience of the antithetically-mixed nature of man, against the doubt both of revealed religion and the world beyond, against the cosmic isolation of the individual, against contingencies of history, against industrialisation, and against revolution as represented in the worse-selling realistic novels. Disoriented mass readers and spectators, whose scant education could not allow them to seriously grapple with those rising doubts, thus found again in books and theatres the orderly world they had lost. The world of romance and melodrama was a world of firm faith and metaphysical security, homiletically inculcated by patronising omniscient narrators, without ambiguities of perspective and sympathy. Stock characters and plots with little individualisation or psychology conveyed a feeling of ever-recurring patterns that discredited novelty. Linear plots with prophecies and flashbacks suggested a pre-established order of the world, one in which patrimonial linearity was only temporarily threatened by villains and usurpers. Contrastive characterisations of black villains and white heroes were set in contrastive semanticised spaces and arranged in contrastive *tableaux vivants*, suggesting an ultimately unshakeable order. The honest and virtuous were never really and ultimately in danger, the relation between *desis* and *lysis* playful rather than threatening. Villains and usurpers of patrimonies were given an opportunity to repent and mend their lives, and met a sensational *similia similibus*-death if they did not take their chance. Highly emotional scenes and occurrences – those on a deathbed, prayers with uplifted hands, blessings, prophecies, curses, and anagnorises – all underscored the superiority of a religiously sanctified moral sense over rational calculation. There were simply no contingencies that were not providential, no sufferings that were not purposeful and conducive to a higher good. Faithful lovers set out on the most dangerous quests for their beloved ones, whom they saved. Improbable events including the unexplained or explained supernatural suggested divine interference undertaken in the interest of virtue and order, counterbalancing the vicissitudes of life represented in quick changes of contrastive scenes and moods with the final triumph of dawn, light, and joy. Bulwer's *Night and Morning* (1841) is a typical example of such a romance, though, like all Bulwer's romances, it is disrupted by elements of the realistic novel.[36] *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) is too a melo-

36 Göbel (1993a), pp. 122 – 34.

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dramatic historical romance broken by a realistically unhappy ending; only the faithful lovers Glaucus and Ione escaping the catastrophe. And so is *The Haunted and the Haunters*, a tale which, like contemporary vampire stories and dramas, ends with a victory over evil that costs many lives and is only temporary.

In their novels as opposed to Bulwer's plays, Bulwer and Dickens could not possibly create purely good or purely evil stock characters typical of romance and melodrama. As a genre, the modern novel had to engage with sombre socio-historical facts and the steady increase of crime. The good Eugene Aram nevertheless slays Clark, a rapist and murderer, and the victim's bones, finally exposed to reveal the perpetrator, symbolise the criminal capacity shared by every human being everywhere.[37] Eugene Aram repents, but is convicted and executed. Here again, Bulwer studied a real criminal case for his mixture of novel and romance. Bulwer's characters are often complex and contradictory, following the Humean doubt of a homogeneous human identity in the age of the discovery of the unconscious.[38] This subversive anthropology, confirmed by Bulwer's experience with his own self-division, also explains the numerous *doppelgängers*, *alter egos*, and mirrors in his novels.[39] His Rienzi is a psychologised and heterogeneously mixed protagonist whose Roman Revolution of 1347 ends in catastrophe, like the French Revolution of 1789. Again, only the faithful lovers Adrian Colonna and Rienzi's sister Irene find happiness. The virtuous Rienzi can be as vicious as his antagonist Walter de Montreal, and vice versa, to the effect that the Roman Revolution, like the French equivalent, ends in the restoration of injustice. The same applies to Warwick, the benevolent yet aggressive fifteenth-century 'last of the barons,' and to Pelham, the contemporary Byronic dandy yet altruistically committed Whig politician. Similarly, in Bulwer's dramas, Richelieu appears as "a man of two characters," comic and tragic alike, grandiose and petty "in startling contrast."[40] Dickens's characters are more homogeneous and static, although his villains, too, have their good sides and opportunities to change their lives for the better.[41] Social and legal injustice, however, does not facilitate the right choice.[42] The insights of nascent psychiatry and psychoanalysis could not be ignored by serious modern novelists and social reformers.

37 Christensen (1976), p. 64; and Worthington (2004), p. 65.

38 Lessenich, Rolf (2011), 'Romanticism and the Exploration of the Unconscious' *Romantic Explorations*, ed. Michael Meyer, Trier: WVT, pp. 185–97.

39 Christensen (2004), p. 10.

40 Bulwer-Lytton (1860), p. 1.

41 John, Juliet (2001), *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture*, Oxford: Oxford UP, argues that Dickens's novelistic melodrama psychologises the exteriority and one-dimensionality of theatrical melodrama, though the latter fascinated him for complex reasons.

42 Göbel (1993b), p. 78.

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In spite of the differences between the novelists in terms of social origin, education, choice of plot, narrative technique, style, character delineation, and, later, party allegiance, there are striking ideological parallels. In the heterogeneous cultural pattern of the Victorians, their anti-Romantic and anti-intellectual attachment to the practical as formulated in the above quotation from Bulwer's *England and the English*, was mixed with the inheritance of Romanticism: their distrust of calculating reason, their nostalgic constructions of a better past, their reattachment of life and art to religion, as well as of ethics to the emotions of the feeling heart. Dickens found in Bulwer the distrust of materialism, agnosticism, scepticism, and calculating reason that he preached in all his novels. Reason and calculation cannot be the basis of moral conduct, a position diametrically opposed to the felicific calculus of the Utilitarians from Malthus to James and John Stuart Mill and Dickens's critic Harriet Martineau, who, in the Enlightenment tradition, distrusted the instable and fallible moral sense.[43] Bulwer's and Dickens's good characters act out of their moral sense and natural benevolence rather than calculation: Bulwer's Adrian Colonna and Zanoni as well as Dickens's Pickwick and Brownlow. Many of Bulwer's and Dickens's villains are Malthusian calculators believing only in facts, Robespierre and Nicot in *Zanoni*, Gradgrind and M'Choakumchild in *Hard Times*, Filer and Alderman Cute in the *Christmas Book* 'The Chimes' (1845). At base level, they are comic villains or simple failures, like the ridiculous middle-class Mervales in *Zanoni*, standing for an arid rational lifestyle devoid of pleasure, imagination, and entertainment. Mrs Mervale eschews Romanticism, instead reading eighteenth-century Enlightenment authors, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, and William Cowper. The narrator of *Zanoni* comments ironically: "Oh, excellent thing thou art, Matter of Fact!" The reverse turns out to be true. The philosopher Condorcet and fictitious artist Nicot, both barren in their respective fields, make a sad contrast with the historical Illuminists Cazotte and Saint-Martin, as well as with the fictitious Esotericists Glyndon and Zanoni. Glyndon repents his former egoism and is saved; Zanoni also repents and dies sacrificing himself under the guillotine by proxy for his beloved Viola. Dickens borrowed Bulwer's *Zanoni* ending for his own *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Sidney Carton sacrificing himself under the guillotine by proxy for his beloved Lucie Manette. Zanoni's death is as melodramatic as Carton's in its appeal to the reader's emotions and its pious affirmation of a world beyond and a spiritual life to come: Dickens borrowed Bulwer's empathetic intertextual references to Christ's sacrifice, Faust's ascent to heaven, and the burial liturgy:

43 House, Humphry (1950), *The Dickens World*, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 39, pp. 74–75.

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> Up from the earth he [Zanoni] rose – he hovered over her [Viola] – a thing not of matter – an IDEA of joy and light! Behind, Heaven opened, deep after deep; and the Hosts of Beauty were seen, rank upon rank, afar; and 'Welcome,' in a myriad melodies, broke from your choral multitude, ye People of the Skies – 'Welcome! O purified by sacrifice, and immortal only through the grave – this it is to die.' And radiant amidst the radiant, the IMAGE stretched forth its arms, and murmured to the sleeper: 'Companion of Eternity! – *this* it is to die!'[44]

The death of Stephen Blackpool, who sees divine light in the depth of a pit which is his grave in *Hard Times*, offers similar religious consolation. In Bulwer's and Dickens's novels, death is the price worth paying for a life of love, with love akin to both imagination and religion with its promise of rich reward for altruism and cure for all pain. Zanoni had bought eternal youth and life for the price of a life without love, joy, and art. But his infallible moral sense boils up again and again, seen in his love of woman and his hatred of rational tyranny. Before the sacrifice, a heavenly visitor with the Hebrew name Adon-Ai (God himself) reveals to Zanoni (as, therefore, does the omniscient homiletic narrator to the reader) the limitation of all human prophet-priestly vision and the glory of death as the portal to total vision of complete truth. Hence a short life with love and death is preferable to a mere boring and barren longevity on this earth with unendingly incomplete knowledge of facts.[45] Zanoni foresees the day of Robespierre's fall, but he cannot foresee that Robespierre orders his Viola to be executed a day earlier, so he decides to return his barren and egoistic longevity for a fertile and altruistic death. Nor is there perfectibility in Bulwer's satirically dystopian novel *The Coming Race* (1871), published a year after the death of Dickens, whose novels also deny any possibility of terrestrial perfection as assumed by many Enlightenment philosophers. Bulwer's Vril-ya, a noble aristocratic race in possession of scientific progress and power that might save imperfect mankind, is itself imperfect because, unlike mankind, it has neither religious nor artistic sensibilities. Moreover, their power is intimidating; their scientific materialism a threat rather than blessing for the progress of mankind, just as the fictitious fifteenth-century steam engine in Bulwer's *The Last of the Barons* darkly foreshadows the Industrial Revolution.[46] The artist's ideal and the priest's faith, Zanoni tells Glyndon, are the same.[47] Commenting on the failure of Robespierre and Nicot, the melodramatically homiletic narrator of *Zanoni* observes that there can be neither enduring ethics nor enduring aesthetics in this world

44 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward (1868), *Zanoni*, *Novels and Tales. A New Edition in Seven Volumes*, London / New York: George Routledge and Sons, pp. 273 – 74.

45 Bulwer-Lytton (1868), pp. 222 – 23.

46 Horsman, Alan (1990), *The Victorian Novel*, *The Oxford History of English Literature*, Oxford: Clarendon P, pp. 58 – 67.

47 Bulwer-Lytton (1868), p. 261.

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without belief in a world beyond.[48] And he adds that nobody has so great an interest in peace and order, in the well-being of society, as the poet and the artist.

This world can be improved by peaceful development, not by revolutions and their millenary visions of a future terrestrial paradise. Both Bulwer and Dickens were violently opposed to both the French and the Industrial Revolutions. In their novels, such uprisings are bound to fail due to the imperfections of man – individually as well as collectively. Their novels could support political, social, and legal reforms as well as contribute to the moral education of their readers, but the heterogeneous nature of man, his double potential for good and evil, remained the same. Noble altruistic fight for justice is not the only motive for the proletarian Rienzi's revolution against the aristocracy – revenge for his young brother's death and a thirst for power are also factors. And the commoners, who first support and hail him as their liberator and tribune, desert him when he must raise tax, and ultimately slay him in complicity with their oppressors, the secular and ecclesiastical aristocrats. 'Ochlocracy,' as Bulwer dubbed mob rule in his controversial *Letter to a Late Cabinet Minister* (1834), is just as bad as oligarchy – a conviction shared by Dickens. Men are naturally unequal and must accept their inequality like their mortality.[49] The narrators of *Rienzi* and *Zanoni* agree that the false ideal that knows no God, and the false love that knows no soul, cannot help but lead to catastrophe.[50] The narrators of Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and *A Tale of Two Cities* share this view. The Gordon Riots of 1780 in *Barnaby Rudge* are fomented by the villain Chester, who misleads the common people into a chaos of violence and bloodshed in order to prevent the marriage of his son Edward with Emma, the niece of his enemy Haredale. The French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities* is fomented by the very personal hatred of Madame Defarge, who, together with her villainous husband, seeks cruelly to revenge the wrongs done to her family by an aristocrat. The shooting of the villainous Madame Defarge by Miss Pross to protect Lucy Manette, making a happy ending for Lucie and Darney possible, may look like a mere accident. But Dickens narrated it so as to show the working of divine providence in darkest times, *deus ex machina*, as a domestication of contingency, melodramatically improbable like the self-sacrifice of Carton and Bulwer's Zanoni. In letters to and conversations with John Forster, Dickens defended the fanciful treatment of truth as "the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age,"[51] to provide orientation and sustenance to his readers. And thus he commented on the death of the unrepentant Madame Defarge that it is not mere

48 Bulwer-Lytton (1868), p. 245.
49 Bulwer-Lytton (1868), p. 281.
50 Bulwer-Lytton (1868), p. 234.
51 Allott, Miriam ed. (1959), *Novelists on the Novel*, London: Law Book Co. of Australia, p. 66.

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accident, but homiletic providential dispensation in a desirable world of ultimate order and justice:

> Where the accident is inseparable from the passion and action of the character; where it is strictly consistent with the entire design, and arises out of some culminating proceeding on the part of the individual which the whole story has led up to; it seems to me to become, as it were, an act of divine justice.[52]

Dickens's comment can also explain and justify the melodramatic *deus ex machina*-deaths of the unrepentant villains of Bulwer's novels, such as Arbaces in *The Last Days of Pompeii*, whom the ashes of the volcano kill thereby preventing his destruction of the romantic lovers just in the nick of time. Nevertheless, Dickens was more of a sceptical realist than Bulwer, whose novels and plays preferred visions and ideals, and his realism increased in the seven novels after *David Copperfield* (1850). Furthermore, the *bildungsroman* evolution of David Copperfield and his Dickensian progeny is forward, whereas, in the case of Bulwer's Kenelm Chillingly (in the eponymous novel published a few days after his death in 1873), there is a regression to romance and the caring aristocratic conservatism of the Middle Ages, as in the novels of Disraeli, who had persuaded Bulwer to join the Tories.[53] Paradoxically, with the warming of the friendship between Bulwer and Dickens, the world views of their novels actually diverged more and more. What kept these two so very different authors together and made them parade their friendship in public were their shared aims, social reform, literary reputations and monetary profit, along with, in all probability, their shared domestic troubles. Dickens seems to have read Bulwer chiefly for the melodramatic elements of his work that drew his large Victorian readership. This appears from Bulwer's critique of the darker endings of Dickens's later novels, as well as from Dickens's estrangement of his readers with these novels that no longer provided them with the desired feeling of metaphysical security in a world of ultimate poetic justice. Dickens and Bulwer were careful not to offend each other through criticism, so there is little direct evidence of dispute such as we have, for example, in Edgar Allan Poe's numerous reviews of Bulwer's novels. A comparison of Bulwer's *Night and Morning* with Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House* shows the difference. In Bulwer's novel, nobody is punished without some guilt of his own – even the good elder Philip Beaufort must die by a fall. Every death is either deserved or part of a conspicuous divine plan. Punishment leads to maturity, repentance and atonement ensure forgiveness, and in the end,

52 Ibid. Dickens's argument had already been advanced in Horace Walpole's preface to his Gothic romance *The Castle of Otranto* (1765).

53 Göbel, Walter (2004), '*Kenelm Chillingly:* The Bildungsroman Revoked' *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton*, ed. Allan Conrad Christensen, Newark / DE: U of Delaware P, pp. 236 – 48.

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the patrimony, temporarily threatened, is ultimately safely restored. This is not so in *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House.* Amy Dorrit and Arthur Clennam, although innocent, do not marry until the loss of both their fortunes. Esther Summerson, although one of Dickens's saints, does not marry Allan Woodcourt until her beauty and the whole Jarndyce estate are lost. In both novels, the irrevocable loss of patrimonies is caused by laws and lawyers, whose ideal should be the preservation of justice, but whose bleak reality, symbolised by John Jarndyce's home called Bleak House, is egoism, greed, and corruption. Arthur's fight against the Circumlocution Office and the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings (with their telling names denoting the tenacity of social customs and conventions) proves futile so that, at the end of the novel, they survive in full strength, standing in the way of man's autonomy as well as reform and progress. Man's mind-forged incarcerations recall Blake's "mind-forged manacles."[54] Both *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House* disillusion their reader with the persistence of their social nightmares, the Circumlocution Office and the Court of Chancery.

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54 Blake, William (2007), *Songs of Experience*, 'London,' 1794, line 8, *Complete Poems*, ed. W.H. Stevenson, London: Pearson Longman, p. 220.

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3.2 'To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt': Charles Dickens and the Ambiguous Ghost Story[1]

For the 1865 Christmas edition of *All the Year Round*, Dickens wrote a collection of altogether three stories entitled 'Doctor Marigold.' The narrator Doctor Marigold, in the frame to his stories, explains that he wrote them as "Prescriptions […] for [the] amusement and interest" (p. 453) of his deaf and dumb adopted daughter. The "Prescriptions" are "To be taken immediately," "To be taken with a grain of salt," and "To be taken for life." The first and the third tales deal with his own and his daughter's life stories, ending with her marriage.[2] The second story is different in its being (allegedly) a ghost story, with a first person narrator relating several ghostly encounters that lead to the solution of a murder case.[3]

This story, "To be taken with a grain of salt," has received some critical attention for mainly two reasons: firstly, Dickens changed the title of the story from 'The Trial for Murder' to its current one and thus made use of a proverb which can be read as a "warning" to the reader to "accept the statement with a certain amount of reserve."[4] The second aspect that has attracted literary

1 I would like to thank Matthias Bauer for discussing this story with me and for giving me helpful advice with regard to the topic of 'ambiguity.'

2 It is to be noted that Doctor Marigold is not a medical doctor, as his "Prescriptions" might suggest but he was given the first name 'Doctor.' He is in fact a 'Cheap Jack': "I was born on the Queen's highway, but it was the King's at that time. A doctor was fetched to my own mother by my own father, when it took place on a common; and in consequence of his being a kind gentleman, and accepting no fee but a tea-tray, I was named Doctor, out of gratitude and compliment to him" (p. 435). – All references are, if not otherwise indicated, to the Oxford edition of Dickens's *Christmas Stories*, ed. Margaret Lane, London: Oxford UP.

3 On Dickens's interest in ghost stories see, e. g. Stone, Harry (1979), *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Novel-Making*, Bloomington: Indiana UP as well as his own commentaries in 'Nurse's Stories,' 'A Christmas Tree,' and in *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, ed. Bernard Darwin, London: Oxford UP, p. 118.

4 Wilson, F.P. (1970), *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (*ODEP*), Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 330. For the meaning of the proverb, see also *OED* "grain, *n.*[1]": '2.d. with a grain of salt [= modern Latin *cum grano salis*] : (to accept a statement) with a certain amount of reserve. Also in similar phrases, now esp. with a pinch of salt."

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scholars is the narrative voice in the story which has been described as 'unreliable' with regard to the ghostly encounters that are narrated.[5]

What has not been commented on so far is the fact that Dickens in his title indicates and produces an ambiguity that is sustained throughout the narrative and eventually leaves the reader puzzled as to the resolution of the story and its events.[6] In this story, it appears, Dickens outwardly followed the tradition of writing a ghost story for the Christmas edition of his magazine but at the same time modified the effect of the story by making it ambiguous. The proverbial title thus can be read as a meta-communicative comment rather than a description of what is to follow (and therefore very different from the titles of other ghost stories, e. g. 'The Haunted House,' 'The Signalman' etc.): the narrative is not to be taken too seriously but to be read with 'reserve.' Dickens's focus is not primarily on ghosts but on the creation of an overall ambiguous story.

1. The Ambiguity of the Title

The title of this story, 'To be taken with a grain of salt,' can be regarded as wordplay: the whole collection of 'Doctor' Marigold is likened to medicine, to pills that are to be 'taken immediately,' 'for life,' and 'with a grain of salt.' This instance of play is highlighted by the fact that 'Doctor' is in this case not a professional designation but the first name of the narrator. Moreover, the title can be read literally, i. e. in its medical sense, or metaphorically, as in the proverb. The first sense, the medical reading, goes back to Pliny's *Natural History*, where the expression appears in Book 23:

> After the defeat of that mighty monarch, Mithridates, Cneius Pompeius found in his private cabinet a recipe for an antidote in his own hand-writing; it was to the following effect: – Take two dried walnuts, two figs, and twenty leaves of rue; pound them all together, with the addition *of a grain of salt*; if a person takes this mixture fasting, he will be proof against all poisons for that day. Walnut kernels, chewed by a man fasting,

5 See especially Greenman, David J. (1989), 'Dickens's Ultimate Achievement in the Ghost Story: "To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt" and "The Signalman"' *The Dickensian* 85, pp. 40 – 48. Neither Glancy, Ruth (1987), 'Dickens and Christmas ' *The Dickensian* 83, p. 67, nor Valzania, Raffaella (1999), 'Dickens e la revisitazione della Ghost Story' *Il confronto letterario quaderni di letterature straniere moderne e comparate dell' Università di Pavia* 32, pp. 385 – 406 comment on this. Hardy, Barbara (2008), *Dickens and Creativity,* London: Continuum does not at all mention the ambiguity of the title (p. 45) nor comment on the narrative voice, although her chapter ('The Artist as Narrator in *Doctor Marigold*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*') suggests a more fulsome discussion of this Christmas story by Dickens.

6 On ambiguity in more general terms and on the ambiguity of texts in particular, see, e. g. Bauer, Matthias et al. (2010), 'Dimensionen der Ambiguität' *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 40, pp. 35 – 6.

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> and applied to the wound, effect an instantaneous cure, it is said, of bites inflicted by a mad dog. (my emphasis)[7]

The 'grain of salt' in its literal sense is here mentioned in a recipe for an antidote to poison. The metaphorical sense can be found in literary texts as early as 1599 and 1647, usually expressing a warning that the statement just made cannot be trusted.[8] This shows that both meanings of the proverbial expression have existed side by side over time.

The inherent ambiguity of the phrase was taken into account by Riley's *Dictionary of Latin Quotations* (1856), in which the author gives the following explanation:

> *Cum grano salis. Prov.*—'With a grain of salt.' With something which will help us to swallow it; with some latitude or allowance. Said of anything to which we are unable to give implicit credence.[9]

Both the medical and the proverbial meaning of the expression coincide here, as much as they do in Doctor Marigold's 'prescriptions' and the content of the story, which is ambiguous.[10]

7 The Latin original reads: "in sanctuariis Mithridatis maximi regis devicti Cn. Pompeius invenit in peculiari commentario ipsius manu conpositionem antidoti e duabus nucibus siccis, item ficis totidem et rutae foliis xx simul tritis, addito salis grano." The translation of Pliny by John Bostock and Henry Thomas Riley, a physician and a lawyer who took to translating Latin authors, was first published in 1855 – 57. Pliny (1855), *The Natural History*, London: Taylor and Francis, Cambridge / MA: Harvard UP, p. 23.77.149.

8 The *ODEP* gives 1599 as the first reference: "Rainolds *Overthrow Stage Plays* 79 Thinke you that you had spoken with any graine of salt?" (*ODEP*, p. 330); the *OED* lists the following as the first occurrence: "1647 J. Trapp *Comm. Epist. & Rev.* (Rev. vi. 11) This is to be taken with a grain of salt" (*OED*, 'grain, *n.*' 2.d.).

9 Riley, Henry Thomas (1856), *Dictionary of Latin Quotations, Proverbs, Maxims, and Mottos, Classical and Mediaeval, Including Law Terms and Phrases: With a Selection of Greek Quotations*, London: Henry G. Bohn, p. 66. Unlike in other cases, Riley does not refer to the source of the proverb, but it is obvious that he knew it from his translation of Pliny.

10 A somewhat similar function can be found in Edward Lear's *Nonsense Cookery* and his recipe 'To Make an Amblongus Pie' where, at the end, he notes to "add a pinch of salt." Lear, Edward (2001), *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*, ed. Holbrook Jackson, London: Faber & Faber, pp. 123 – 4, which not only refers to the seasoning but also acts as a meta-commentary. On the ambiguity of Lear's wordplay in this recipe see Zirker, Angelika (2010),'Don't Play With Your Food? Edward Lear's Nonsense Cookery and Limericks' *The Pleasures and Horrors of Eating: The Cultural History of Eating in Anglophone Literature,* ed. Marion Gymnich / Norbert Lennartz, Göttingen: Bonn UP, p. 238.

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2. The Ambiguity of the Story

Even though Dickens changed the title of the story from 'The Trial for Murder' into 'To be taken with a grain of salt,' the content of the story, at least on one level, does indeed deal with a 'trial for murder.' It is told by a homodiegetic narrator who begins his narrative as follows:

> I have always noticed a prevalent want of courage, even among persons of superior intelligence and culture, as to imparting their own psychological experiences when those have been of a strange sort. Almost all men are afraid that what they could relate in such wise would find no parallel or response in a listener's internal life, and might be suspected or laughed at. A truthful traveller, who should have seen some extraordinary creature in the likeness of a sea-serpent, would have no fear of mentioning it; but the same traveller, having had some singular presentiment, impulse, vagary of thought, vision (so-called), dream, or some other remarkable *mental impression*, would hesitate considerably before he would own to it. (pp. 455 – 56; my emphasis)

This first paragraph is rather conspicuous, at least in retrospect, that is after one has read the whole story: it sounds like a justification of the narrative that is to come, but also like an attempt to dispel the reader's possible prejudice, i. e. his scepticism towards "mental impression[s]." This effect is underlined by the subsequent paragraph, in which the narrator refers to cases of "spectral illusion" in his "private circle of friends," and ends with this sentence: "It cannot be referred to my inheritance of any developed peculiarity, nor had I ever before any at all similar experience, nor have I ever had any at all similar experience since" (p. 456). It is as if he wanted to assure his readers of his sanity, which, in the course of the story, makes him all the more suspicious.

After these preliminary remarks begins the story proper, with the narrator reading about a murder in the newspaper. The murder was committed in the victim's bedroom, and while reading about this, the narrator "seems to see that bedroom passing through [his] room, like a picture impossibly painted on a running river" (p. 456). When he looks out of the window after this, he sees two men walking behind one another: "The foremost man often looked back over his shoulder. The second man followed him [...] with his right hand menacingly raised" (p. 457). The gesture is heeded by nobody in the street, which surprises the narrator. This is the first time he sees these men, one of whom turns out to be the "figure" of the murdered man reported on in the newspaper.

His first vision of the two men in the street is followed by a description of his own situation, which means that he now portrays his own person, before returning to the events of his story:

> I am a bachelor, and my valet and his wife constitute my whole establishment. My occupation is in a certain branch bank, and I wish that my duties as head of a de-

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> partment were as light as they are popularly supposed to be. They kept me in town that autumn, when I stood in need of change. I was not ill, but I was not well. My reader is to make the most that can be reasonably made of my feeling jaded, having a depressing sense upon me of a monotonous life, and being 'slightly dyspeptic.' I am assured by my renowned doctor that my real state of health at that time justifies no stronger description, and I quote his own from his written answer to my request for it. (p. 458)

As in the first paragraphs of the story, the narrator wants to establish himself as credible, as someone stating facts, and this seems to be the function of his detailed explanations. But his eagerness to establish psychological credibility also evokes "some scepticism about his psychological equilibrium,"[11] especially so as the narrator describes himself in terms that do not actually point towards a particularly stable mental state;[12] thus, while he apparently wants to create a certain image of himself, an objective one (see, e. g., the reference to his doctor), the reader may construe something different, especially when rereading the tale.

The narrator's (subjective) descriptions continue: shortly after a second vision of the murdered man, the narrator is made a member of the jury that tries the man he saw with the phantom; that man is charged with the murder of the other man, who followed him on Piccadilly. On the day of his summoning for the jury, the narrator sees this man again. While the narrator is in his own bed-room – and he gives us the very details of his apartment's setup when describing the incident[13] – he sees a man open the door to his dressing-room who beckons to the narrator and then closes the door again. His servant had stood with his back

11 Greenman (1989), p. 41. "The reader must be careful not to be misled by the narrator into granting him perfect reliability. The opening paragraphs of the story, ostensibly designed to establish his credibility, may instead be read as clues to his psychological imbalance. He is too rational, too careful to rule out anything abnormal in his own psyche." Greenman (1989), p. 42. The narrator's attitude is reminiscent of the homodiegetic narrator in Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart' but with a twist as here, in Dickens, the reader cannot be entirely sure what is happening. This is also the reason why the mere label of 'unreliability' does not do justice to the complexity of the narrative situation in this story. On reliability in narrative texts see, e. g., Booth, Wayne C. (1961), *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, esp. 158 – 9; Diengott, Nilli (1995), 'Narration and Focalization – The Implications for the Issue of Reliability in Narrative' *Journal of Literary Semantics* 24, pp. 42 – 9; Yacobi, Tamar (1981), 'Fictional Reliability as a Communicative Problem' *Poetics Today* 2, p. 121.

12 His physical state may be indicative of psychological problems, as, for instance, in the case of Mr. Merdle in *Little Dorrit*, who is likewise described as being "dyspeptic:" "'You are well, I hope, Mr. Merdle?' 'I am as well as I – yes, I am as well as I usually am,' said Mr Merdle. 'Your occupations must be immense.' 'Tolerably so. But – Oh dear, no, there's much the matter with me,' said Mr Merdle, looking round the room. 'A little dyspeptic?' Mr Dorrit hinted.'Very likely. […]'" Dickens, Charles (1968), *Little Dorrit*, ed. John Holloway, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 674. See also chapter 21 'Mr Merdle's Complaint' in volume I of *Little Dorrit*, when he is first introduced (p. 299).

13 This is a typical strategy of the narrator: he mixes detailed and realistic descriptions with 'supernatural' events, i. e. the ghostly encounters are set in an everyday and fully inconspicuous environment.

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towards the door, but upon the narrator laying his "hand upon his breast," he exclaims: "Oh Lord, yes, sir! A dead man beckoning!" (p. 459). The servant cannot possibly have seen the man, and the narrator explains the supernatural occurrence in terms of yet other supernatural, "occult" means: "The change in him was so startling, when I touched him, that I fully believe he derived his impression in some occult manner from me at that instant" (p. 459). However, it actually remains wholly unresolved how his servant came to know about what was literally going on behind his back.

This incident illustrates in how far the events that are described by the narrator are ambiguous: the reader cannot be sure if the "impression" was at that moment indeed derived from the narrator to his servant "in some occult manner," which would suggest that some nonverbal transmission of impressions is possible (which might imply the real existence of ghosts) – or whether he even is so obsessed by his own belief in the events that he ends up being convinced of something that is in reality not true, or whether the narrator has made up the incident and his servant's reaction. This generates three readings of the story so far: either the appearance of the phantom is real and therefore perceptible – and this perception can be transmitted to someone else; or the narrator is mad and obsessed by the idea of the phantom appearing to him; or, and this has only very implicitly been suggested so far, he is trying to make us believe that the phantom does appear, for whichever reason. In each case, the text acquires a different function: it is either a ghost story that wants to show that there are, to speak in Hamlet's words, 'more things between heaven and earth' than we might be aware of; or Dickens wants to give his readers access to the psyche of a madman; or the narrator wants to set his reader on the wrong track, for instance, in order to obfuscate the truth.

The narrator now goes on to present the development of the case.[14] When he describes his first day at court, the subjectivity of his impressions is brought to the foreground, together with a great amount of uncertainty on the narrator's behalf:

> I *think* that, until I was conducted by officers into the old court and saw its crowded state, I did not know that the murderer was to be tried that day. I *think* that, until I was so helped into the old court with considerable difficulty, I did not know into which of the two courts sitting my summons would take me. But this must not be received as a positive assertion, for I am not completely satisfied in my mind on either point. (p. 460)[15]

14 He tells the reader that the suspected murderer "had been committed to Newgate for trial" (p. 458) and that the Sessions had been postponed (p. 458). The remainder of the tale deals with court proceedings and further visions of the murdered man.

15 He begins his account of the first day at court with the description of the rather gothic surroundings: "The appointed morning was a raw morning in the month of November.

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The highlighted repetition of "think" (emphasis in original) not only points towards the subjectivity of his impressions but also to the fact that he is not sure as to the reality of the events he describes, especially so as each is followed by the declaration that he "did not know." At the end of the passage, he himself qualifies his account in explaining that what he says cannot "be received as a positive assertion," underlining again that, although his statement as such is true, the events may not, which results in a certain degree of ambiguity with regard to the events and his narrative: he may either be trying to suggest that he had some supernatural premonition without wanting to be held responsible for it, or he wants to insinuate that he might have known the facts (or not), which would be part of a certain strategy of obfuscation that he pursues.

His description of the trial begins with his recognition of the suspect as "the first of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly" (p. 460). At the same time, the man becomes "violently agitated" on seeing the narrator and asks his attorney to challenge him as member of the jury, which is, however, unsuccessful.[16] The narrator then even becomes foreman of the jury.

The reader does not learn a lot about the defendant; one might even argue that the narrator tries to distract his reader's attention from him:

> Both on the ground already explained, that I wish to avoid reviving the unwholesome memory of that murderer, and also because a detailed account of his long trial is by no means indispensable to my narrative, I shall confine myself to such incidents in the ten days and nights during which we, the jury, were kept together, as directly bear on my own curious personal experience. It is in that, and not in the murderer, that I seek to interest my reader. It is to that, and not to a page of the Newgate Calendar, that I beg attention. (p. 461)

He neither wants to fully focus on the events of the trial nor on the person who presumably committed the crime, and he gives two kinds of reasons for this: the objective reason being that the man should not be recognisable;[17] the narratological one that he wants to restrict his narrative to his "own curious personal experience." However, the question remains for whom the memory of this trial would be "unwholesome" and why.

There was a dense brown fog in Piccadilly, and it became positively black and in the last degree oppressive east of Temple Bar" (p. 460), thereby catering to the generic demands and conventions of the ghost story. On Gothic elements combined with realistic ones in Dickens's ghost stories, see, e. g., Vescovi, Alessandro (2000), 'The Bagman, the Signalman and Dickens's Ghost Story' *Dickens: The Craft of Fiction and the Challenge of Reading. Proceedings of the Milan Symposium, Gargnano 1998*, ed. Rossana Bonadei, Milan: Unicopli, p. 119.

16 The reason for this request is only revealed to the reader at the end of the story.

17 "It does not signify how many years ago, or how few, a certain murder was committed in England which attracted great attention. […] I purposely abstain from giving any direct clue to the criminal's individuality" (p. 456).

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The status of the narrator remains ambiguous. He openly comments on his uncertainty with regard to facts at several points in the narrative, then gives many particulars and details on apparent marginalia to illustrate his exactitude and refrains from giving an explanation for appearances and events, e. g. when the phantom appears in his bedroom. This way of narrating continues to leave open a spectrum of how to interpret the events: there is still the possibility that the narrator reports actual supernatural occurrences; or that he believes himself to be reporting actual supernatural incidents, while he is in fact mad or obsessed with an idea; or that the narrator is lying. And these three possibilities are sustained throughout the narrative and are left unresolved even when the story ends.

On the second day of the trial, some strange events take place: the narrator is unable to count his fellow jurymen, and when he asks one of them to try, he cannot do it either; at the same time, however, the narrator is perfectly able to count the strokes of the church clock.[18] The strangeness of this inability to count leads to his "inward foreshadowing of that figure that was surely coming" (p. 461).[19] This speaks for the second possible reading of the story: he is possessed by the thought that he sees these visions and interprets everything that happens in light of this belief. But then the figure does indeed appear, and his "inward foreshadowing" proves to have been correct.

In the evening, after the retirement of the jurymen to the London Tavern, where they all sleep in one large room, the narrator joins Mr. Harker, the officer who holds them "in safe-keeping" (p. 462), for some snuff and a chat before going to sleep. All other jurymen are already in their beds. Suddenly, Mr. Harker cries out "Who is this?"

> Following Mr. Harker's eyes, and looking along the room, I saw again the figure I expected – the second of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly. I rose, and advanced a few steps; then stopped, and looked round at Mr. Harker. He was quite unconcerned, laughed, and said in a pleasant way, 'I thought for a moment we had a thirteenth juryman, without a bed. But I see it is the moonlight.' (p. 462)

While, for a moment, the reader is led to believe that the apparition is now finally seen by someone else, this belief is shattered when Mr. Harker actually comments on his 'thinking' that there was one juryman too many, but then explains his vision away by attributing what he saw to the moonlight. Again, this leads to

18 "On the second morning of the trial, after evidence had been taken for two hours (I heard the church clocks strike), happening to cast my eyes over my brother jurymen, I found an inexplicable difficulty in counting them. […] In short, I made them one too many" (p. 461).

19 He stresses his "inward" premonitions throughout, e. g. earlier, after the short appearance of the figure in his bedroom, he states that he had "no inward expectation of seeing the figure in the dressing-room, and I did not see it there" (p. 459).

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ambiguity: does Mr. Harker in fact see a thirteenth juryman – as does the narrator – and say "it is the moonlight" only because he does not believe in visions of any kind? But then he would probably not be "unconcerned" and laughing. Or does the narrator also merely see the moonlight but thinks it is the man he saw go down Piccadilly because he *wants* to think so? This is likewise improbable as the narrator then goes on to describe what the figure does; he "proves" its existence by describing the effect of this nightly visit: the figure goes to every juryman's bed and looks "down pensively at each recumbent figure" (p. 462). The next morning all jurymen say that they "had dreamed of the murdered man last night" (p. 462), Mr. Harker and the narrator excepted. He concludes the account of this incident with the following statement: "I now felt as convinced that the second man who had gone down Piccadilly was the murdered man (so to speak), as if it had been borne into my comprehension by his immediate testimony. But even this took place, and in a manner for which I was not at all prepared" (p. 462). He stresses his *conviction* at this point – "I felt convinced" – and thus apparently wants to steer the reader towards an unequivocal reading of the events.

The description of this incident hence illustrates how the narrator tries to make his statement credible. But just before the incident, in his introduction of Mr. Harker, he had stressed an, at first seemingly inconspicuous, detail about the officer:[20] "He was intelligent, highly polite and obliging, and (I was glad to hear) much respected in the City. He had an agreeable presence, *good eyes*, enviable black whiskers and a fine sonorous voice" (p. 461; my emphasis). This not only shows that the accuracy when it comes to detail is mingled with highly subjective comments; but the added value judgement of Mr. Harker's eyes also helps stress an aspect that is relevant to the narrative: he has *good* eyes.[21] If this really is the case, why would he then have mistaken the moonlight for a thirteenth juryman? Or does his identifying what he saw as produced by moonlight prove that it was nothing but moonlight, because he has such good eyes? The overall ambiguity of the story stays intact, even despite – or because of – the added evidence, mainly because it leaves the vision with the narrator.

The combination of objective and realistic detail and subjective perception (or even value judgement) goes on for the remainder of the narrative and makes the ambiguity of the narrator pending: at times he seems to be almost omnis-

20 There are plenty of examples of these details; for instance, it is striking how precise his descriptions are, e.g., "Mr Harker's bed was drawn across the door" (p. 462), which is inconspicuous in itself but is a means to create credibility – and, of course, to prevent an alternative explanation, i.e. that someone might have been in the room for a moment.

21 The name is almost a telling one, cf. the meaning of "hark, *v.*" in the *OED:* "1. *trans.* To give ear or listen to; to hearken to, hear with active attention." This means that his senses and his perceptive abilities are emphasised through his name and his appearance.

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cient, for instance, when he refers to Harker's "good eyes," at times he seems to be highly subjective and restricted in his perception and then gives "evidence" for his premonitions, thus trying to objectify them: he expects the appearance of the figure – and it appears; he is convinced of its identity – and the evidence is delivered to him. On the fifth day of the trial, "a miniature of the murdered man […] was put in evidence" (p. 462). When it is handed to the Jury for inspection,

> the figure of the second man who had gone down Piccadilly impetuously started from the crowd, caught the miniature from the officer, and gave it to me with his own hands, at the same time saying, in a low and hollow tone, – before I saw the miniature, which was in a locket – '*I was younger then, and my face was not then drained of blood.*' It also came between me and the brother juryman to whom I would have given the miniature, and between him and the brother juryman to whom he would have given it, and so passed it on through the whole of our number […]. Not one of them, however, detected this. (p. 463)

It remains wholly unexplained how it could be that the officer would not notice the miniature being taken away from him, and how the jurymen would not realise this either; how the voice of the figure remains unheard by everybody but the narrator; and how nobody "detected" anything, not even felt the appearance of the phantom, while later, when he makes his appearance among people, they faint and collapse.[22] What is more, this miniature does not really resemble the man the narrator has seen. The figure even comments on this and thus establishes a connection between the portrait and himself which, apparently, would not be obvious through the portrait alone.

After this incident, the figure continues to appear several times throughout the trial. At the end, when it comes to considering the verdict, there is some disagreement among the jurymen. It takes them almost two and a half hours to find the defendant guilty, and the narrator seems to be quite upset at this delay. It is mainly caused by three fellow jurymen that were introduced earlier in the tale, after the fifth day of the trial:

> a vestryman – the *densest* idiot I have ever seen at large – who met the *plainest* evidence with the *most preposterous* objections, and who was sided with by two *flabby parochial*

22 "I saw it bending forward, and leaning over a very decent woman, as if to assure itself whether the Judges had resumed their seats or not. Immediately afterwards that woman screamed, fainted, and was carried out. So with the venerable, sagacious, and patient Judge who conducted the trial. When the case was over, and he settled himself and his papers to sum up, the murdered man, entering by the Judges' door, advanced to his Lordship's desk, and looked eagerly over his shoulder at the pages of his notes which he was turning. A change came over his Lordship's face; his hand stopped; the peculiar shiver, that I knew so well, passed over him […]; and did not recover until he had drunk a glass of water" (pp. 464 – 5). The use of adjectives to describe these people – "decent woman," "venerable, sagacious, and patient Judge" – is quite striking, especially when it comes to his portrayal of characters that are not of his opinion or go against the grain of his perception (see below).

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> *parasites*; all the three impanelled from a district so delivered over to fever that they ought to have been upon their own trial for five hundred murders. When these *mischievous blockheads* were at their *loudest* […] (p. 463; my emphases)

What is really noteworthy in this passage is how he disparages these sceptical fellow jurymen, for example by calling one "the densest idiot," and how he uses superlatives to describe his denigration. This somehow deceives the reader over the fact that, except for a miniature of the murdered man that is being handed around in court, no evidence whatsoever seems to have been provided. And when a witness appears who speaks in favour of the accused, the narrator comments on this as follows: "a witness to character, a woman, deposed to the prisoner's being the most amiable of mankind. The figure in that instant stood on the floor before her, looking her full in the face, and pointing out the prisoner's evil countenance with an extended arm and an outstretched finger" (p. 464). It is the narrator who describes the suspect's countenance as an "evil" one,[23] and the figure has to appear in this instance to "prove" the contrary of what is said by the witness.[24]

Moreover, the narrator refers to the "monotony of six of those interminable ten days" and the sameness of the experience throughout: "the same Judges and others on the bench, the same Murderer […], the same lawyers […], the same tones […], the same scratching of the Judge's pen, the same ushers […], the same lights […], the same […]" (p. 465).[25] He imitates the "wearisome monotony" even stylistically and refers to his perception, mostly visual and auditive. At the same time, he stresses his awareness of the events around him and the reliability of his perception as "the murdered man never lost one trace of his distinctness in my eyes, nor was he at any moment less distinct than anybody else" (p. 465).[26]

23 On Dickens's play with countenance and physiognomy, see Zirker, Angelika (2011), 'Physiognomy and the Reading of Character in *Our Mutual Friend*' *Partial Answers* 9, pp. 379 – 90.

24 The narrator, towards the ending of the story, refers to this incident again and writes about the figure's presence in court: "It seemed to me as if it were prevented, by laws to which I was not amenable, from fully revealing itself to others, and yet as if it could invisibly, dumbly and darkly overshadow their minds. […] When the witness to character was confronted by the appearance, her eyes most certainly did follow the direction of its pointed finger, and rest in great hesitation and trouble upon the prisoner's face" (p. 464). He thus makes a causal connection of her movement with that of the finger.

25 'his *ennui* is limitless' Greenman (1989), p. 43.

26 The enormity of his boredom leads to Greenman's suggestion that "he was so bored that he invented or believed he really saw a ghost." Greenman's is one of the few articles that actually deals with this story. His focus is on the (lack of) reliability of the narrator, which he explains in terms of his psychological imbalance that is indicated at the beginning of the story. He concludes with deeming the narrator to be a "spectre" himself and the statement: "Of the sober documentations […] the reader must be wary." Greenman (1989), p. 43, which he

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But this monotony of the narrative as well as of the narrated events is eventually disrupted, once he comes to the ending of his story and the conclusion of the trial, when the prisoner is found guilty:

> The murderer, being asked by the judge, according to usage, whether he had anything to say before sentence of death should be passed upon him, indistinctly muttered something which was described in the leading newspapers of the following day as 'a few rambling, incoherent and half-audible words, in which he was understood to complain that he had not had a fair trial, because the foreman of the jury was prepossessed against him.' The remarkable declaration that he really made was this: '*My Lord, I knew I was a doomed man, when the foreman of my jury came into the box. My Lord, I knew he would never let me off, because before I was taken, he somehow got to my bedside in the night, woke me, and put a rope round my neck.*' (p. 466)

The ambiguity of the text is strengthened by the statement of the defendant.[27] Either the alleged murderer is able to see ghosts as well and thus was able to

relates to the frame of 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions.' What he presents in his article is a range of examples from the text that support this connection of psychological imbalance with unreliability. This at times leads to a reductive approach to the text, e.g., when he suggests that Dickens, "in his late stories, he presents the reader with events that are solidly positioned in the real, everyday world, characterized by fascination with *and* incredulity about the reality of uncanny, reappearing figures and recurring events." Greenman (1989), p. 41; for a similar view of the relation between the realistic setting and the mysterious events with regard to 'The Signalman,' see Day, Gary (1998), 'Figuring out the Signalman: Dickens and the Ghost Story' *Nineteenth Century Suspense*, ed. Clive Bloom, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 28; and Mengel, Ewald (1983), 'The Structure and Meaning of "The Signalman,"' *Studies in Short Fiction* 20, pp. 271 – 328. See also Henson, Louise (2005), 'Investigations and Fictions: Charles Dickens and Ghosts' *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. Nicola Bown et al., Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 57. The confusion that the text evokes reflects that experienced by many contemporaries who attempted to define the boundary between madness and sanity in questions of the uncanny and the marvellous. For Dickens's interest in madness and mental phenomena, see, e.g. Kaplan, Fred (1975), *Dickens and Mesmerism: The Hidden Springs of Fiction*, Princeton: Princeton UP and MacKnight, Natalie (1993), *Idiots, Madmen and Other Prisoners in Dickens*, New York: St. Martin's P. What the present paper is trying to show goes beyond the mere statement of "unreliability" and "incredulity," and rather attempts to flesh out the inherent ambiguities within the story. On Dickens's treatment and use of ambiguity in more general terms, see Bauer, Matthias and Angelika Zirker (forthcoming), 'Dickens and Ambiguity: The Case of *A Tale of Two Cities*' *Dickens, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. Christine Huguet and Nathalie Vanfasse, Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire.

27 This ending has been described as providing "an amazing gothic surprise." Greenman (1989), p.41. The passage recalls an earlier explanation by the narrator: "When the murder was first discovered, no suspicion fell – or I ought rather to say, for I cannot be too precise in my facts, it was nowhere publicly hinted that any suspicion fell – on the man who was afterwards brought to trial" (p. 456). Here he only mentions – and he is indeed "precise in [his] facts" – that the suspicion of the man was "nowhere publicly hinted" at. He goes on to explain: "As no reference was at that time made to him in the newspapers, it is obviously impossible that any description of him can at that time have been given in the newspapers. It is essential that this fact be remembered" (pp. 456 – 7). But this explanation leaves open the

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perceive the "apparition" of the narrator by his bedside; this reading suggests that there is a higher justice, working by supernatural means, which sees to it that the murder gets his deserved punishment, in spite of witnesses; but this supernatural justice might just as well be part of the narrator's obsession and his idea of the defendant being a murderer, which would mean that the narrator is mad; or, a third possibility, he is indeed trying to conceal his own guilt, that he is a murderer himself, which is further suggested by the fact that he puts a rope around the defendant's neck.[28]

3. Why Ambiguity? Or: Against 'Weakening the Terror'

The question remains to be asked why Dickens would not simply write a ghost story like *The Chimes* and *A Christmas Carol* in which ghosts appear and bring about a change in the main character or deliver a moral message. Part of the answer certainly lies in the fact that Dickens was not only a writer but also a reader of ghost stories, and his reading of one story by Gaskell gives some evidence that helps explain, or at least contextualises, the ambiguity of his own narrative.

In December 1852, Dickens wrote a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell to discuss a ghost story she had submitted for the Christmas edition of *Household Words*, 'The Old Nurse's Story.' He especially commented on the ending of the story:

> I have no doubt, according to every principle of art that is known to me from Shakspeare [sic] downwards, that you weaken the terror of the story by making them all see the phantoms at the end. And I feel a perfect conviction that the best readers will be the most certain to make this discovery. Nous verrons.[29]

The story by Gaskell is told by an old nurse about events in her youth when she moved to a house in the Fells with her young charge, the girl Rosamond – her listeners are Rosamond's daughters. The house, Furnivall Manor, is inhabited by an elderly woman, Miss Furnivall, her friend and several servants. After a few weeks at the house, the nurse, Hester, hears the organ in the main hall played,

possibility that he actually went to see the man and did stand at his bedside – it is a gap in his narrative, and the statement "[i]t is essential that this fact be remembered" becomes ambiguous: it can either refer to the reader, who has to remember this fact in order to find the narrator reliable; or it refers to the status of the narrator, who has kept his knowledge from his reader and is not reliable, because the man was only not hinted at "publicly," which does not exclude the narrator's knowledge of him, i. e. the narrator has merely not mentioned that he had seen the suspect before the actual trial and the encounter on Piccadilly.

28 This reading suggests an anticipation of Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

29 Dickens, Charles (1988), *The Letters of Charles Dickens: The Pilgrim Edition*, ed. Madeline House et al., Oxford: Clarendon P, vol. 6, p. 815.

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but, as she finds out, there is no player. Then, the child Rosamond meets another child outside, is lured away by her, and, when found, is almost frozen to death. The child appears again, always trying to lure Rosamond outside, into the cold winter weather.[30] The background to these events is finally revealed to Hester by an old servant: the old Lord had two daughters, Maude and Grace, both very proud and both in love with a musician who was their father's guest. The elder daughter secretly married him, had a child, and when her father found out about this,[31] struck the child on the shoulder with his crutch, expelled his daughter and her child from his house, and sent them out into the cold, where they died. At the end of the story, the ghost of the elder sister of Miss Furnivall appears to the household with her child and her father, who re-enacts the striking of his grandchild with his crutch. Next to them stands the phantom of Grace Furnivall – a young woman – who watches the scene "with a look of relentless hate and triumphant scorn,"[32] while the aged Miss Furnivall likewise watches the scene, cries out and begs for mercy. On seeing the scene from the past re-enacted by the spectres,[33] Miss Furnivall eventually breaks down, uttering the words: 'What is done in youth can never be undone in age!"[34] Gaskell's story is thus one of guilt and pride – and it concludes with the moral that those sins are neither forgotten nor forgiven in the course of time and cannot be 'undone.'[35]

Dickens's criticism of the ending of Gaskell's story refers to the fact that all members of the household can see the ghosts, and not just the child. His argument is an aesthetic one, referring to both tradition ("from Shakspeare [sic.] downwards")[36] and to current readership ("the best readers"). On December 17,

30 This is at least remotely similar to one of the stock features mentioned in Dickens's 'A Christmas Tree' – the Orphan Boy.

31 We are not told how the old Lord learnt about this; but it is implied that Grace gave away her elder sister's secret: "And all the while, Miss Grace stood by him, white and still as any stony; and, when he had ended, she heaved a great sigh, as much as to say her work was done, and her end was accomplished." Gaskell, Elizabeth (2004),'The Old Nurse's Story' *Gothic Tales*, ed. Laura Kranzler, London: Penguin, pp. 11 – 32, p. 28.

32 Ibid., p. 32.

33 The scene has a similar effect as when Scrooge sees the phantoms of the past in *A Christmas Carol.* I would like to thank Matthias Bauer for pointing out this similarity to me.

34 This is further evidence speaking for her giving away her sister's secret, as, otherwise, there would be less need for her to feel guilty; cf. above, n31.

35 Gaskell (2004), p. 32;'The Old Nurse's Story' was Gaskell's first ghost story. Cf. Sharps, John Geoffrey (1970), *Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention: A Study of Her Non-Biographic Work*, Fontwell: Linden P, p. 141. Sharps, argues in favour of Gaskell's ending, p. 144. For more readings of Gaskell's ghost story, see, e.g., Marroni, Francesco (2010), *A Reconsideration of Nineteenth Century English Fiction,* Rome: The John Cabot UP, pp. 120 – 136; Martin, Carol A. (1989), 'Gaskell's Ghosts Truths in Disguise' *Studies in the Novel* 21, pp. 27 – 39; and Uglow, Jenny (1995), 'Introduction. Elizabeth Gaskell' *Curios, If True Strange Tales*, ed. Jenny Uglow, London: Virago P, pp. vii – xiii.

36 He probably has *Macbeth* in mind here as well as *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar.* In *Hamlet*, the

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however, he finally gives in: "I don't claim for my ending of the Nurse's Story that it would have made it a bit better. All I can urge in its behalf, is, that it is what I should have done myself."[37]

In referring to Shakespeare when it comes to avoiding any weakening of the terror evoked by the ghost's appearance, Dickens implicitly takes up an argument famously put forward by Ann Radcliffe when she reflects on the creation of 'terror' in opposition to 'horror' in her prologue to *Gaston de Blondeville*, later to be published as 'On the Supernatural in Poetry':

> 'How happens it then,' said Mr. S___, 'that objects of terror sometimes strike us very forcibly, when introduced into scenes of gaiety and splendour, as, for instance, in the Banquet scene in Macbeth?'
>
> 'They strike, then, chiefly by the force of contrast,' said W___; 'but the effect, though sudden and strong, is also transient; it is the thrill of horror and surprise, which they then communicate, rather than the deep and solemn feelings exited under more accordant circumstances, and left long upon the mind. Who ever suffered for the ghost of Banquo, the gloomy and sublime kind of terror, which that of Hamlet calls forth? though the appearance of Banquo, at the high festival of Macbeth, not only tells us that he is murdered, but recalls to our minds the fate of the gracious Duncan, laid in silence and death by those who, in this very scene, are reveling in his spoils. There, though deep pity mingles with our surprise and horror, we experience a far less degree of interest, and that interest too of an inferior kind. The union of grandeur and obscurity, which Mr. Burke describes as a sort of tranquillity [sic] tinged with terror, and which causes the sublime, is to be found only in Hamlet; or in scenes where circumstances of the same kind prevail.'[38]

The two travellers in this scene argue about the nature and creation of horror in opposition to terror. Horror is "transient," and it is achieved by a paralysing certitude, while terror is based on "uncertainty and obscurity" and is "left long upon the mind."[39]

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ghost is seen by different guards at the beginning but remains invisible to Gertrude. In his earlier ghost stories, for instance, in *A Christmas Carol* (1841), *The Chimes* (1844), and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848), Dickens also has only the protagonists see ghosts.

37 Dickens (1988), *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 6, pp. 822 – 3. It is not the first time he asked her to change a story – Hopkins provides an overview of all requested changes, e. g., in the denouement of 'Lizzie Leigh' and 'The Heart of John Middleton.' See Hopkins, Annette B. (1946), 'Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 9, pp. 361 – 2. See also Nayder, Lilian (2002), *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship*, Ithaka / NY: Cornell UP on Gaskell's feeling "controlled" by Dickens when submitting stories to his periodical.

38 Radcliffe, Ann (1826), 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' *New Monthly Magazine* 16, pp. 146 – 52. *The Literary Gothic*, 23 July 2002 www.litgothic.com (accessed 18 March 2013).

39 When Radcliffe, Ann (1826), 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' refers to Burke, she probably thinks of the following passages that he writes about terror: "To make any thing very terrible,

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Dickens's story likewise is based on obscurity, but he also goes beyond it in that the ambiguities he creates in his story remain unresolved;[40] rather, he gives us at least three distinct possibilities how to read the story, thus leaving the story "long upon the mind,"[41] and leaving his readers with a feeling of terror. The narrator is the only character who sees the phantom, and the subjectivity of perception creates ambiguity and allows for different readings. This is the effect that Dickens wanted to achieve and that he found lacking in Gaskell's story because she left no doubt as to the existence of ghosts.

obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds […] It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it *affecting* to the imagination." Burke, Edmund (1958), *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton, London: U of Notre Dame P, pp. 58 – 60. Burke here gives obscurity as the source of terror, and he stresses the fact that one cannot "form clear ideas" of "ghosts." Dickens, however, seems to take up this notion of 'clear ideas' to offer the reader distinct notions of what might be going on in the story, thus creating terror.

40 Burke attributes the creation of terror to the effects of words: "It may be observed that very polished languages, and such as are praised for their superior clearness and perspicuity, are generally deficient in strength" (p. 176). He thus juxtaposes perspicuity and "weakness" in effect with strength in effect that is implicitly based on obscurity. See his whole chapter on 'Words' in Part 5 of his *Enquiry* (pp. 161 – 77). – On the history of obscurity in rhetoric and literature, see, e.g. Walde, C. / Brandt, R. et al. (2003),'Obscuritas: II. Mittelalter – VII Moderne' *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik,* ed. Gert Ueding, 10 vols., Tübingen: Niemeyer, 6, pp. 358 – 68, pp. 368 – 83.

41 Henry James in *The Turn of a Screw* creates terror in a similar way, namely also based on ambiguity: does the narrator invent the ghosts, is she mad? Or is she a ghost herself? On the ambiguity in *Turn of a Screw* see Wilson, Edmund (1934), 'The Ambiguity of Henry James' *Hound & Horn* 7, pp. 385 – 406. See also Greenman: "What are we to think? All at once the ghost of the murdered man seems trivial; the living narrator himself has been an even more spectacular spectre! If a man is as bored with his daily routines as this narrator clearly is, might he not want to liven things up a bit with a bizarre tale that challenges his audience's skepticism, leaving them in awe of him. Henry James would have recognized the dodge, since his *The Turn of the Screw* is the ne plus ultra of this kind of tale." Greenman (1989), p. 43.

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Barbara Korte (Freiburg)

3.3 A "comrade and friend": The Cultural Work of Charles Dickens's Periodicals

1. Conducting Cultural Work

Not only was Charles Dickens an avid reader, but he also cared intensely about what people read. At a time when the Victorian print market increasingly provided affordable reading matter for the masses, Dickens – like other literati of the day – was concerned about the quality of much of that reading matter. In the 'Preliminary Word' to the first issue of *Household Words* (1850), Dickens castigated cheap periodicals that published escapist fiction and sensational journalism whose existence he identified as a "national reproach."[1] Indeed, the blooming periodicals market of the day[2] provided a considerable amount of reading that Dickens considered cheap not only in price but also in quality –

1 Dickens, Charles (1850), 'Preliminary Word' *Household Words*, no. 1 (30 March 1850), pp. 1 – 2. All references are taken from *Dickens Journals Online*. The University of Buckingham. www.djo.org.uk

2 By the 1850s the periodicals market in Britain had begun to expand rapidly in proportion to growing literacy and the development of cost-efficient means of producing print. As Richard Altick notes in his landmark study of the *English Common Reader:* "Great as was the increase in book production between 1800 and 1900, the expansion of the periodical industry was greater still." Altick, Richard D. (1998), *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public*, Columbus / OH: Ohio State UP, p. 318. This was only natural, for of all forms of reading matter, periodicals – including newspapers – are best adapted for the needs of a mass audience. "[…] They appeal to the millions of men and women who consider the reading of a whole book too formidable a task even to be attempted" (p. 318). In 1859, the critic E.S. Dallas noted in his article 'Popular Literature – the Periodical Press' (*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 85, January/February): "The rise of the periodical press is the great event of modern history. […] A periodical differs from a book in being calculated for rapid sale and for immediate effect. […] It is necessary, therefore, to the success of a periodical, that it should attain an instant popularity – in other words, that it should be calculated for the appreciation, not of a few, but of the many. Periodical literature is essentially a popular literature." King, Andrew and John Plunkett eds. (2004), *Popular Print Media 1820 – 1900*, 3 vols., London: Routledge, pp. 418 – 9. For further information on Victorian periodicals and their audiences cf. also Vann, Jerry Don and Rosemary T. van Arsdel eds. (1994), *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, Toronto, U of Toronto P.

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although he was otherwise a champion of popular culture[3] (and highly sensitive to his own popularity with the public). One way to react to the proliferation of cheap reading was to start his own periodical aimed at a large audience, namely *Household Words*, that would satisfy Dickens's standards for good fiction and journalism.[4]

Dickens edited *Household Words* (hence *HW*) and its immediate successor, *All the Year Round* (*AYR*), with great dedication for twenty years.[5] The two periodicals were almost identical in design (a simple two-column layout without illustrations) and purpose.[6] Indeed, *AYR* only came into being because Dickens fell out with his publisher Evans over publishing a statement about the separation from his wife Catherine in 1858 which had given rise to rumours that Dickens feared might harm his standing with the public. Dickens had published the statement in *The Times* and in *Household Words*, but when he planned to do the same in *Punch*, which was also owned by Evans, the publisher refused. Offended, Dickens decided to terminate *HW* and establish in its stead a magazine that he would own entirely (while he had only partly owned *HW*). *AYR* existed separately from *HW* for five issues but after a lawsuit Dickens managed to obtain the full rights for *HW,* so that the new and old titles could merge in June 1859.

Dickens edited *HW* and *AYR* – or rather 'conducted' them, as he preferred to identify his role in the masthead of both publications – until his death in 1870. He produced one issue per week and extra issues for Christmas, always parallel to his many other activities, including, of course, the writing of his novels. Peter

3 Indeed, one of Dickens's own first pieces for *Household Words* was dedicated to 'The Amusements of the People' (no. 1, 30 March 1850, 13 – 5 and no. 3, 13 April 1850, pp. 57 – 60). On 21 August 1858, *Household Words* printed Wilkie Collins's now well-known investigation of contemporary popular reading, 'The Unknown Public' (no. 459, 217 – 22). John, Juliet, (2006), 'The Novels and Popular Culture' *A Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. David Paroissien, Oxford: Blackwell and John, Juliet (2010), *Dickens and Mass Culture*, Oxford: Oxford UP and Schlicke, Paul (1985), *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, London: Allen and Unwin, discuss Dickens's belief in the importance of popular culture, and Sally Ledger notes that "Dickens's ambition in *Household Words* was nothing less than to wed an eighteenth-century conception of 'the People' as a political entity to the emergent nineteenth-century category of the 'populace' in a commercial culture." Ledger, Sally (2007), *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 172. For an investigation of how Dickens was perceived and saw himself as a popular writer see Rodensky, Lisa (2009), 'Popular Dickens' *Victorian Literature and Culture* 37, pp. 583 – 607. The nineteenth-century debate about popular culture and popular reading is summarised in Newey, Katherine (2010), 'Popular Culture' *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1830 – 1914*, ed. Joanne Shattock, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, pp. 147 – 61.

4 Dickens's affinities to journalistic work for newspapers and magazines date back to his early days as a reporter of House of Commons debates for the *Morning Chronicle*.

5 For data relating to the two publications see the entries in the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*.

6 There are however some differences: *All the Year Round* published more serialised fiction, and it was also less committed to social campaigning than its predecessor.

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Ackroyd's biography of Dickens notes admiringly how much time and energy Dickens invested in his periodicals:

> It says something about the nature of Dickens's genius that he felt able to edit such a weekly periodical for the next twenty years; for the rest of his life he was to engage in laboured and often difficult editorial work, day by day, week by week, correcting the articles of others, cutting and reshaping, entitling, collaborating with other writers, corresponding, dealing with printers and distributors. He was doing a job that any number of nineteenth-century journalists could have accomplished but here we have the greatest author of his age working continually without complaint or apology. In 1852, for example, on his own estimate he read nine hundred manuscripts (of which only eleven were suitable for publication, and that after substantial rewriting by himself), as well as receiving and answering over two thousand letters.[7]

This tireless editing was financially profitable. As Anne Lohrli notes in her magisterial autopsy of the *HW* office book, this periodical alone "had a sale of some forty thousand copies a week" and became, as Dickens hoped it would, "a good property," yielding "a good round profit."[8] *AYR*, which printed more fiction, never went below a hundred thousand copies a week. But profit was not Dickens's main reason for running his own periodicals. More importantly, they provided him with a medium through which he could speak to his readers about their culture in a manner that was particularly versatile since *HW* and *AYR* were conducted as *magazines*, i. e. a periodical form that is by definition heterogeneous. With its typical mixture of pieces on miscellaneous topics and in different genres and formats, a magazine offers its readers knowledge, entertainment, opinion and interpretation. In Dickens's novels, the author's wide-ranging interests are contained by the demands of plot and character. To a magazine, thematic diversity is endemic, and Dickens recognised the form as a congenial vehicle through which he could engage with the many facets of his society.[9] *HW* and *AYR* faced a lot of competition, but Dickens took the risk because he was aware of the magazine's special suitability for the contemporary cultural moment – as a print commodity *and* as a medium for the negotiation and circulation of cultural meaning. In the pages to follow I will therefore argue, adopting a term from Jane Tompkins, that Dickens's magazines performed "cultural work" for their readers.

Tompkins coined the concept for her discussion of nineteenth-century

7 Ackroyd, Peter (1990), *Dickens*, London: Sinclair-Stevenson, p. 591.

8 Lohrli, Anne ed. (1973), *Household Words: A Weekly Journal 1850 – 1859, Conducted by Charles Dickens*, Toronto: U of Toronto P, p. 23.

9 Cf. Huett, Lorna (2005), '"Among the Unknown Public:" *Household Words, All the Year Round* and the Mass-Market Weekly Periodical in the Mid-Nineteenth Century' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 38, pp. 61 – 2, who states that "a struggle for self-definition and for meaning was an inherent part of the writing, editing, design and marketing of every journal."

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American popular fiction. Popular (sentimental and sensational) novels, she claims, had a special cultural significance and impact in their day

> because they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment. I believe that [they …] were written not so that they could be enshrined in any literary hall of fame, but in order to win the belief and influence the behaviour of the widest possible audience. These novelists have designs upon their audiences, in the sense of wanting to make people think and act in a particular way.[10]

Dickens's magazines were intended to perform cultural work in precisely this sense: They offer examples of the way mid-Victorian culture thought about itself, and they articulated major cultural interests and concerns. And even more purposefully than the novels discussed by Tompkins, they were *designed* as an instrument through which Victorian culture could be read by 'expert' readers (Dickens's carefully selected contributors, including himself) for the benefit of a big and devoted audience. It seems fitting, therefore, that the titles of *HW* and *AYR* not only suggest a place and significance in people's everyday lives but are derived from Dickens's reading of an earlier popular writer whose works had interpreted his own contemporary world and later became part of the nation's heritage. As the mastheads announce through citations, Dickens found his titles in Shakespeare's plays: the first is a direct quote from *Henry V*,[11] while the second title is more indirectly linked to a line from *Othello*.[12]

With a gesture of authority also supported by such links, Dickens's magazines represented their readers' culture for them, voiced their anxieties and desires, and contributed to the formation of the mid-Victorian self at a time when that self was bemused and bewildered by a world undergoing transformation in many areas of life: through urban growth, the spread of consumerism, advances in science and technology, the imperial project as well as shifts in social stratification and gender roles. The 'Preliminary Word' to *HW* announces the agenda for Dickens's magazine project and suggests that cultural work for a public exposed to the winds of change was indeed one of his main intentions:

10 Tompkins, Jane (1985), *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790 – 1860*, New York / Oxford: Oxford UP, p. xi.

11 In Shakespeare, William (1995), *Henry V*, ed. Thomas Wallace Craik, London, Routledge, IV.iii, ll. 51 – 6 King Henry delivers his famous Crispian's speech, prophesying that the men fighting in the battle of Agincourt will become household names in later memory: "Then shall our names, / Familiar in his mouth as household words […] / Be […] freshly remembered." Dickens – who was notorious for being a rigorous editor of other writers' texts – did not hesitate to edit even Shakespeare for his purposes: The quote in the masthead of *Household Words* has a plural instead of Shakespeare's singular: "Familiar in their mouths as household words." The Shakespearian phrase is altered to fit Dickens's vision of the large readership he wanted to reach – of both sexes, all ages and conditions.

12 Shakespeare, William (1995), I. iii, ll. 129 – 30.

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> We aspire to live in the Household affections, and to be numbered among the Household thoughts, of our readers. We hope to be the comrade and friend of many thousands of people, of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions, on whose faces we may never look. We seek to bring into innumerable homes, from the stirring world around us, the knowledge of many social wonders, good and evil, that are not calculated to render any of us less ardently persevering in ourselves, less tolerant of one another, less faithful in the progress of mankind, less thankful for the privilege of living in this summer-dawn of time.[13]

These sentences indicate, first of all, how important a close relationship to his readers was to Dickens. To live in their everyday affections and thoughts was not an empty phrase, but a true aspiration also reflected in Dickens's pricing of his magazines: Their weekly numbers cost only 2 pence per issue, which made them affordable even to families with a small income. At a price almost as low as that of the publications Dickens considered a 'national reproach,' his readers received excellent quality, and for families with a higher income, they were a very good deal. As Richard Altick notes, middle-class families would have found *HW*

> a remarkable bargain. The writing and editing were done by competent professionals; controversial issues were treated forthrightly; general articles were not only patronizing rehashes of useful information; and the fiction was something more than the customary circumspect 'family' narrative, whose perfunctory morality did not wholly conceal a yawning emptiness of ideas. […] Its great importance is that through the excellence of its contents and the prestige of Dickens's name it helped to break down further the still powerful upper- and middle-class prejudice against cheap papers.[14]

A low price was possible because Dickens's magazines, in their original weekly editions,[15] were printed on relatively cheap – thin and acidic – paper, and because the 24 pages per issue were not illustrated. This lack of pictures could have

13 'Preliminary Word' no. 1 (3 March 1850), p. 1.

14 Altick (1998), p. 347.

15 Out of his instinct for the market and from his desire to reach as many readers as possible, Dickens also offered more costly editions of the magazines that yielded more profit: *Household Words*, for instance, came out in monthly editions with wrappers as well as attractive biannual editions that were suitable for the private and commercial library. This price policy indicates that, while Dickens also addressed the working classes, the audience he had primarily in mind were members of the middle classes. On Dickens's publication strategy for his magazines also cf. Huett, Lorna (2005), p. 78 who notes "a distinct ambiguity in the nature of Dickens's periodicals:" "on one hand they were given an honorific treatment at their publication in semi-annual volume form, ready for inclusion in the most respectable library; on the other, they rubbed shoulders with the most disreputable forms of cheap literature while appearing in penny weekly numbers. This was evidently a deliberate choice on Dickens's part: throughout his career he was always most concerned with finding the most cost-efficient form of publication for his novels. His wish that his writings should be available for purchase to as many readers as possible must have had an economic motive, but there was also a strong moral dimension to his thinking, as is evinced by the perpetual calls in his work for cheap, instructive entertainment for all."

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been a risk because the Victorians loved visual pleasures and many magazines with which *HW* and *AYR* competed were lavishly illustrated on their title pages and inside.[16] Nevertheless, Dickens decided to rely on the word alone, and not only for reasons of cost.

Their price ensured that *HW* and *AYR* were not out of reach for readers of the labouring classes and that all 'conditions' were indeed potentially addressed. However, the main audience for Dickens's magazines was recruited from the middle classes, and it was their attitudes, values, fears and sentiments to which *HW* (and later *AYR*) were targeted to appeal. Dickens used *HW* in particular to champion social reform, but he wanted to do so in a manner that, despite outspokenness, would not distress his middle class readers through whom, after all, much of that social reform and social welfare would have to be effected. As Anne Lohrli remarks:

> None of the abuses decried in *Household Words*, none of the reforms advocated, none of the conditions criticized, were first brought to public attention by *Household Words*; but the popular – 'readable' – discussion of these matters in Dickens's widely read periodical brought them attention that their sober presentation in specialized journals and in upper-class journals did not give them.[17]

Furthermore, articles in each issue were carefully balanced: Darker pieces were countered by more optimistic and humorous ones, and where appropriate, social criticism was expressed in a light mode. Last but not least, even when diagnosing social ills, Dickens wished to project the greater vision of a society that had already improved and would be improving further if everyone made an effort. The 'summer-dawn of time' invoked in the 'Preliminary Word' is not meant ironically but expresses Dickens's conviction that the present, even though it needs reform, is better than the past and may lead to an even better future.

Many articles in *HW* (and later *AYR*) point out in which ways the Victorian present was defective or needed to be explained. But Dickens did not intend his magazines to lecture and preach to their readers. Rather, he envisaged them as the reader's 'comrade and friend,' as a kind of travel companion that would accompany and guide readers gently through the minor and major issues of their time. Dickens's vision of *HW* as a friend has an anthropomorphic quality, and as a friendly character, the magazine needed a special voice for the cultural work it was intended to enact. It is the 'Dickensian' tone that distinguished Dickens's magazines from most of their competitors, and as conductor Dickens invested

16 Brake, Laurel and Marysa Demoor eds. (2009), *The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth Century: Picture and Press*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, p. 167, and Brosch, Renate and Merle Tönnies eds. (2008), *Victorian Visual Culture*, Heidelberg: Winter.

17 Lohrli (1973), *Household Words*, p. 5.

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much energy in making his contributors adhere to the kind of voice he had in mind. By setting a specific tone, Dickens overruled the magazine's typical polyphony as a multi-authored publication. This multi-vocality was not normally disguised even though mid-Victorian magazines still often published articles anonymously. Dickens, however, did precisely this, leaving his authors unidentified and submitting them to his strict editorial policy. Anne Lohrli's analysis of the *HW* office book shows that about 400 different writers contributed to the magazine. About a quarter of its material (apart from serialised novels) was written by Dickens himself and his staff; most of the rest was authored by a group of regular contributors, but pieces were also submitted.[18] Dickens tried to ensure that all these different writers spoke with one voice, but his editorial control was not always appreciated by those whose writing was interfered with. When Elizabeth Gaskell observed that everything sounded "Dickensy," this was not meant as a compliment; nor was the observation of the journalist Douglas Jerrold that *HW* was a "mononymous" publication.[19]

For the kind of cultural work that Dickens intended, however, such 'mononymity' had its advantages because it helped to execute another element of Dickens' agenda: that everything presented should be bathed in "that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast" ('Preliminary Word'). Everything, including factual and informative material, was to be expressed in a way that would be entertaining, picturesque or quaint. "As one means to this end, writers resorted to such devices as personification, fantasy, vision, fable, fairy tale, imaginary travels, contrived conversations, and the use of fictitious characters to serve as mouthpieces of information and opinion."[20] An instructive example is a loose series that ran through *HW* for several months:[21] 'The Phantom Ship' consisted of articles by Henry Morley about "various parts of the globe," including Africa, China, Japan, and Central America. While perusing these articles, readers would glean much factual information about these countries such as size, important places, climate, history or population, but they would do so as participants of an imaginary cruise, having been invited to board a strange, spectral ship that would take them on a flight over the countries in question and offer them, quite literally, a bird's-eye view. It is in respect of such fanciful narrative devices that the lack of illustrations in *HW* turns into an advantage since no actual images could interfere with the mental images which readers were invited to construct. As a novelist as well as editor, Dickens wanted to make his readers engage imaginatively and creatively with their world. The subsequent

18 Ibid., p. 15.

19 Cf. Ackroyd, (1990), pp. 589, p. 595.

20 Lohrli (1973), *Household Words*, p. 9.

21 The series began with 'Negro Land,' no. 43 (18 January 1851), pp. 400 – 7, and ended with 'Antediluvian Cruise,' no. 73 (16 August 1851), pp. 492 – 6.

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section will trace some of the social and cultural themes addressed in Dickens's magazines, with special attention to the journalism of *HW* (rather than its fiction and poetry), and a few supplementary glimpses at *AYR*. Although this discussion has to be brief, it indicates how the magazines 'read' Victorian culture in order to provide their readers with guidance through their lives, the important events of their day and the challenges raised by modernisation.

2. Some Victorian Themes in *HW* and *AYR*

A conspicuous cultural theme in *HW* is the social question that haunted Dickens throughout his life. Even if the labouring classes did not constitute the bulk of his magazine's readers, their cause is regularly brought to the attention of the middle classes. *HW* printed articles on the Factory Acts and included Dickens's long and sympathetic report on the Preston industrial strike.[22] Many pieces were dedicated to the situation of the London poor,[23] including reports on visits that had led Dickens and his staff writers to slum tenements and workhouses. Such explorations were not innovative; Henry Mayhew had published widely noted 'letters' in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849 – 50 on the situation of the poor that were then turned into his book about *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). While Mayhew's mode of presentation was documentary and ethnographic, Dickens went for a more emotional presentation apt to raise the social conscience and charity of middle-class readers. The scandal of poverty in wealthy London is exposed, for instance, in an article entitled 'A Nightly Scene in London.'[24] Written by Dickens himself, it depicts the fate of shelterless people to whom access to a workhouse in Whitechapel is denied. The article points out the abjectness of the poor by rendering them in a hauntingly strange imagery that first emphasises their apparent loss of humanity and life through objectification, and then turns them into alarming and accusing effigies:

> Crouched against the wall of the Workhouse, in the dark street, on the muddy pavement stones, with the rain raining upon them, were five bundles of rags. They were motionless, and had no resemblance to the human form. Five great beehives, covered with rags – five dead bodies taken out of graves, tied neck and heels, and covered with rags –

22 'On Strike', no. 203 (11 February 1854), pp. 553 – 9. *Hard Times*, which is often linked to Dickens's experience of the Preston strike, was serialised in *Household Words* from no. 210 (1 April 1854).

23 'Up a Court,' no. 125 (14 August 1852), pp. 508 – 12, written by George A. Sala; 'A Walk in a Workhouse,' no. 9 (25 May 1850), pp. 204 – 7, written by Dickens himself; 'Frost-Bitten Homes' no. 262 (31 March 1855), pp. 193 – 6, written by Henry Morley. All authors named here were identified by Lohrli (1973).

24 No. 305 (26 January 1856), pp. 25 – 7.

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> would have looked like those five bundles upon which the rain rained down in the public street. […] Five awful Sphinxes by the wayside, crying to every passer-by, 'Stop and guess! What is to be the end of a state of society that leaves us here!'

HW and *AYR* were expressly targeted at "both sexes" and included articles with gendered interests. Pieces on the household, fashion and other consumer articles were of special interest to middle-class female readers. Some of these articles were written by men,[25] but some women amongst Dickens's regular contributors, such as Eliza Lynn and Harriet Martineau, appear to have been specially entrusted with feminine topics (while not being restricted to them). Martineau, for instance, contributed articles on bread making, the production of silk ribbons and an evening school for women to *HW*.[26] *HW* also did not turn a blind eye on the contemporary 'woman question' and commented on early feminist demands, if not always with sympathy. While Lynn, apparently Dickens's expert for the dawning feminism, championed the reform of marriage laws,[27] she cautioned against a radical upheaval of the dominant gender order:

> Women have great legal and social wrongs, but will this absurd advocacy of exaggeration remedy them? The laws which deny the individuality of a wife, under the shallow pretence of a legal lie; which award different punishments for the same vice; the laws which class women with infants and idiots, and which recognise principles they neither extend nor act on; these are the real and substantial Wrongs of Women, which will not, however, be amended by making them commanders in the navy or judges on the bench. To fling them into the thick of the strife would be but to teach them the egotism and hardness, the grasping selfishness, and the vain-glory of men, which it has been their mission, since the world began, to repress, to elevate, to soften, and to purify. Give woman public functions, and you destroy the very springs of her influence.[28]

While the British women's movement was gaining speed during the 1860s, *AYR* followed its progress with an increasing number of articles that declared sympathy for some demands but otherwise continued *HW's* admonitions that reform in that area should have limits. In 1869, a long article welcomed the admission of women to institutions of higher education,[29] and a piece in 1868 supported calls "for the house of commons to consider giving women more rights in marriage."[30] But another article, quite in support of a reform of the

25 'A Ladies' Warehouse' by Samuel Sidney, *Household Words* no. 292 (27 October 1855), pp. 301 – 5.

26 'The Miller and His Men' no. 96 (24 January 1852), pp. 415 – 20; 'Rainbow Making' no. 99 (14 February 1852), pp. 485 – 90; 'The New School for Wives' no. 107 (10 April 1852), pp. 84 – 9.

27 'The Marriage Gaolers' no. 328 (5 July 1856), pp. 583 – 5.

28 'Rights and Wrongs of Women' no. 210 (1 April 1854), pp. 158 – 61.

29 'Lectures for Ladies' *All the Year Round* no. 50 (new series) (13 November 1869), pp. 566 – 9, author unknown.

30 'Slaves of the Ring' *All the Year Round* no. 480 (4 July 1868), pp. 85 – 8, written by Joseph Charles Parkinson.

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married women's property laws, starts with sentences that express distaste at the 'everlasting' debate around 'absurd' demands made in an improperly aggressive tone:

> Of all the subjects on which nonsense can be talked, or written, there is, perhaps, none more fertile in absurdities than the everlasting controversy on the endless question of the 'subjection of women.' Whether women are to vote, to sit in parliament, to be doctors, lawyers, and clerks, as the one party hotly contends they should be, or whether are they to confine their attention exclusively to the smaller details of domestic life, as the other side with equal vehemence insists, are questions on which debate never ceases. And the point is argued with an amount of acrimony, a shrillness of invective, and a general loss of temper, quite amazing to contemplate.[31]

HW and *AYR* were no news media – such as the contemporary, highly popular *London Illustrated News* – but as the readers' comrades and friends, they were sensitive to how news-making events affected the British public, and they helped this public to understand and cope with news. During the Crimean War and the Sepoy Rebellion (Indian Mutiny), two key political and military events of the 1850s, *HW* printed articles that provided readers with background on the countries and people with whom their nation was allied or at war. During the Crimean War, it also addressed the army's and government's mismanagement of that war and the resulting human cost. The article 'Back from the Crimea,'[32] written by James Payn, gave voice to public distress over the state of sick and crippled soldiers that were brought home from the Crimea. With another current topic, the urgency of sanitation reform, *HW* could afford a more fanciful narrative device. A severe cholera epidemic in London in 1849 led to the foundation of a Metropolitan Sanitary Association to which Dickens lectured about the urgency of reform. *HW*'s article on 'Father Thames,' written by Richard H. Horne[33] clothes its lecture in a fantastic story about how the problem of polluted drinking water might be solved: Mr Beverage has a conversation with a giant apparition of Father Thames, whose invitation to a cup of tea he politely declines on account of the dirty water. Mr Beverage is then taken by Father Thames on a trip along the river and its "a hundred and forty-one sewers between Battersea and London Bridge," being instructed about the river's pollution and its causes until they reach a spot from which the water authorities could and should get clean water.[34] Such campaigning, however, did not lead to immediate results, and only the Great Stink of the summer of 1858 caused authorities to finally translate

31 'Married Women's Property' *All Year Round* no. 82 (new series) (25 June 1870), pp. 89 – 93, author unknown.

32 No. 258 (3 March 1855), pp. 119 – 20.

33 No. 45 (1 February 1851), pp. 445 – 50.

34 Another *Household Words* article dedicated to the sewage problem was 'A Foe Under Foot' no. 142 (11 December 1852), pp. 289 – 92, written by Henry Morley.

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plans for a new sewage system into action; *AYR* reported on the respective activities and their progress.[35]

The magazines were just as attentive to the cultural events of their day and explained their wider significance. *The* event of 1851 was the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, and articles in *HW* followed how the exhibition was planned, how the spectacular building was executed, how many foreign visitors came to London and how the exhibition and its many visitors generally affected London life.[36] *HW*'s articles convey the excitement around the exhibition – just like *AYR* would later expose the excitement and excesses of the Shakespeare tercentenary in 1864[37] – as well as its demonstration of Britain's industrial and political power. The anxiety that this power might be precarious was articulated in *HW* on the occasion of another event: the arrival at the British Museum of one of the Winged Bulls that the archaeologist Austen Henry Layard had famously excavated in Mesopotamia. The Bull became a museum attraction, but a piece in *HW* on 8 Feb 1851 (no. 46, 468 – 469) lent 'The Nineveh Bull' an ominous voice. His monologue, written by W.H. Stone, is a melancholy complaint about the fall of the great Assyrian empire, once proudly represented by the Bull who now finds himself exhibited in another great empire, one "prouder, greater, more glorious than [his] native realm." This empire, however, the Bull admonishes, may also not endure: "but boast not, ye vainglorious creatures of an hour. I have outlived many mighty kingdoms, perchance I may be destined to survive one more." Such meditations on transitory greatness were part of a widespread awareness of a coming pastness of the present that is powerfully

35 As Flanders notes: "Sewers and sewerage became a subject of fascination to the reading public." In 1861, *All the Year Round* took readers along the sewers from Finchley Road in north London to Vauxhall Bridge, showing the different types of waste: blood sewers under the meat markets, where "'you could wade in the vital fluid of sheep and oxen;' 'boiling-sewers' near sugar bakers, where the effluent was always hot; 'open rural sewers that were fruitful in watercresses, and closed town sewers whose roofs are thickly clustered with edible fungi;' and 'sewers of different degrees of repulsiveness' near chemical works and factories. (Informed that he was underneath Buckingham Palace, the reporter's 'loyalty was at once excited, and taking off my fan-tailed cap, I led the way with the National Anthem, insisting that my guides should join in the chorus.' The sewer workers' response was is not recorded.)" Flanders, Judith (2012), *The Victorian City: Everyday Life in Dickens's London*, London: Atlantic Books, p. 225. In *All the Year Round* the series 'Underground London' ran weekly from no. 117 (20 July 1861), pp. 390 – 4 until no. 121 (17 August 1861), pp. 486 – 9; it was written by John Hollingshead.

36 Clemm, Sabine (2009), *Dickens, Journalism, and Nationhood: Mapping the World in* Household Words, London: Routledge or a thorough discussion of *Household Words*'s presentation of the Great Exhibition.

37 *All the Year Round* contributed to the celebration of the national icon but also pointed out to what extremes the commodification of the festivities had gone and that some Bard worshippers had actually gone 'Shakespeare Mad,' as an article by Andrew Halliday on 21 May 1864 was titled (no. 265, pp. 345 – 51).

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expressed in Gustave Doré's vision of a London in ruins at the end of a book about *London* for which the journalist William Blanchard Jerrold (a frequent contributor to *HW*) had written the text. Ideas about British greatness and cultural superiority – a tenet of the imperial project – were also threatened to be undermined in 1854, when a disturbing revelation was published about the Franklin expedition. This expedition in quest of the North West Passage had gone missing in the Arctic in 1845, and like other periodicals *HW* reported on the various expeditions sent after Franklin because the British public was deeply sympathetic towards the lost crew. But then the report of one of these search expeditions, written by Dr. John Rae, suggested that the starving men had committed cannibalism in the last resort and thus violated the moral standards of 'civilisation' on which the British imperial project and the self-image of a nation in progress were built. *HW* made a decided intervention and calmed its readers' anxieties. Dickens's own article on 'The Lost Arctic Voyagers'[38] claimed reassuringly in very clear, and in this case unfanciful terms, that

> Dr. Rae may be considered to have established, by the mute but solemn testimony of the relics he has brought home, that Sir John Franklin and his party are no more. But, there is one passage in his melancholy report, some examination into the probabilities and improbabilities of which, we hope will tend to the consolation of those who take the nearest and dearest interest in the fate of that unfortunate expedition, by leading to the conclusion that there is no reason whatever to believe, that any of its members prolonged their existence by the dreadful expedient of eating the bodies of their dead companions. Quite apart from the very loose and unreliable nature of the Esquimaux representations (on which it would be necessary to receive with great caution, even the commonest and most natural occurrence), we believe we shall show, that close analogy and the mass of experience are decidedly against the reception of any such statement, and that it is in highest degree improbable that such men as the officers and crews of the two lost ships would or could, in any extremity of hunger, alleviate the pains of starvation by this horrible means.

While these were singular events, Dickens's magazines also accompanied their readers through their daily experience of a world in transformation – a transformation that was particularly felt in the bustling metropolis. George Sala, one of Dickens's staff writers, frequently wrote about ways in which London life was modernising: in terms of traffic,[39] building activities and intensified consumerism. His opening article on 10 April 1852 addressed 'The Great Invasion' of brick and mortar,[40] thus referring to the enormous, largely unplanned growth of

38 *Household Words,* no. 245 (2 December 1854), pp. 361 – 5. The article was continued in no. 246 (9 December 1854), pp. 385 – 93; a reply by Rae opened no. 248 (23 December 1854), pp. 433 – 7.

39 'The Omnibus Revolution' *Household Words* no. 327 (28 June 1856), pp. 561 – 4.

40 *Household Words* no. 107, pp. 69 – 73.

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London that had turned the city into something 'magnificent' but also 'monstrous' and was therefore to be feared just as much as a French invasion. Sala's article on new shopping passages humorously contrasted the new materialistic 'Arcadia' with its ideal classical namesake.[41] In 'Things Departed,' Sala addressed the cost of modernisation and described what had disappeared from the London cityscape during his lifetime – an experience which many Londoners over the age of forty would have shared.[42] That Britain's position at the van of technological progress gave rise to fear and loss as well as pride and power is also prominent in several articles that followed the construction of a great piece of Victorian engineering in the late 1850s. On the Isle of Dogs, Londoners could watch the growth of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's huge iron steamship, the *Great Eastern*, popularly renamed as the *Leviathan*. This ship too was monstrous and magnificent, a harbinger of a new era in shipbuilding in the London docks, but also of the risks which technological progress might entail. The article 'A Morning Call on a Great Personage' by John Hollingshead depicts the first, ill-fated attempt to launch the colossus the previous November.[43] The spectacle had attracted a mass of sightseers but ended with the disaster of several men being injured and killed during the launch. The text articulates ambivalent feelings in face of technological achievement which many contemporaries must have felt. When the reporter describes how he approaches the site of the launch, he perceives the ship as a "long, silent monster, stretching along above the house-tops – above the tree-tops – and standing in impressive calmness, like some huge cathedral." The ship is grand and uncanny at the same time, out-sizing all human dimensions. However, the article then offers the troubled reader the comfort of a friend and points out that even monstrous change can be accommodated. To demonstrate this, it shows how leaps in technological advancement earlier in the 19th century and still within living memory had also at first been disconcerting but soon lost their uncanniness:

> On all occasions of this kind you meet with a good deal of character, brought out by the surrounding circumstances. There is the practical man, bloated with all the traditions of the past, but a hopeless blank as to the future; who would rather cling to the inventions and appliances that we have, than fly to others that he knows not of. He is, at the present time, a good representative of those men, laughed at now, who backed a Margate hoy against the first locomotive engine that ever ran on rails, and who considered the man who first proposed to light London with gas a dangerous lunatic of the Guy Fawkes' breed, against whom every man's hand ought to be turned who did not wish to see his home in flames, and his children calcined.

41 *Household Words* no. 169 (18 June 1853), pp. 361 – 84.
42 *Household Words* no. 95 (17 January 1852), pp. 397 – 401.
43 *Household Words* no. 406 (2 January 1858), pp. 60 – 4.

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Mid-Victorian anxieties about new inventions, the article thus suggests, may also seem ridiculous in years to come, once they have become part of everyday life.

Besides many new things, Victorian Britain had new institutions and infrastructures that Dickens's magazines taught them to understand. The first issues of *HW*, for instance, reported on the work of the detectives of Scotland Yard's Criminal Investigation Department that had been founded in 1842.[44] Other articles depicted the work of the London fire brigades[45] (a service urgently required in a city with many fire risks) or expressed worries about the comforts and safety of rail travel.[46] An article by Dickens and his staff writer W.H. Wills gives a behind-the-scenes account of the Great National Post Office and its efficiency, which is documented with many figures and statistics.[47] This might have been dull, but Dickens once more found an intriguing title, 'Valentine's Day at the Post Office,' and started the account with a narrative typical of investigative reporting. The reporters devise a clever test for the post office that involves brightly coloured envelopes, and they set up their investigation with great secrecy:

> Late in the afternoon of the 14th of February last past, an individual who bore not the smallest resemblance to a despairing lover, or, indeed, to a lover in any state of mind, was seen to drop into the box of a Fleet Street receiving-house two letters folded in flaming covers. He did not look round to see if he were observed, but walked boldly into the shop with a third epistle, and deposited thereon one penny. Considering the suspicious appearance of this document – for it's [sic] envelope was green – he retired from the counter with extraordinary *nonchalance*, and coolly walked on towards Ludgate Hill. Long paces soon brought him to St. Martin's-le-Grand, for he strode like a man who had an imminent appointment. Sure enough, under the clock of the General Post-Office, he joined another, who eagerly asked, – 'Have you done it?' The answer was, 'I have.' 'Very well. Let us now watch the result.'

Inside, the narrative pattern changes, as the formula 'open sesame' clearly announces. The post-office now becomes a fairy-tale space in which letters are sorted and processed with magical speed and ingenuity. The unpaid test letter of the investigators is discovered, and the readers are told how much delay and

44 For instance, 'A Detective Police Party' no. 18 (27 July 1850), pp. 409 – 32 and no. 20 (10 August 1850), pp. 457 – 60, by Charles Dickens, or 'On Duty with Inspector Field' no. 64 (14 June 1851), pp. 265 – 70, also by Dickens.

45 'The Fire-Brigade of London' no. 7 (11 May 1850), pp. 145 – 51, written by Richard Horne.

46 'A Narrative of Extraordinary Suffering' no. 68 (12 July 1851), pp. 361 – 3, by Dickens himself; 'Need Railway Travellers Be Smashed?' no. 88 (29 Nov. 1851), pp. 217 – 21, written by Henry Morley. Dickens experienced a rail disaster himself in 1865 and was traumatised. He wrote about this trauma in the fictional mode, in the short story 'The Signalman' that was part of the Christmas issue of *All the Year Round* (10 December 1866), pp. 20 – 5.

47 *Household Words* no. 1 (30 March 1850), pp. 6 – 12.

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extra cost is caused by letters such as this so that, amid all astonishment, they are admonished to always use the efficient system of stamps, which was then still fairly new.[48]

While many pieces in Dickens's magazines were thus dedicated to life in Britain and especially in London, *HW* and *AYR* also reflected mid-Victorian Britain's relationships to the world abroad. Not surprisingly, areas of discovery and colonisation featured prominently, even sometimes in Christmas issues. The very first Christmas number of 21 December 1850 described not only how Christmas was celebrated at home, with a proper Christmas Pudding, or in the British Navy or among the British poor, but also 'In the Frozen Regions,' 'In India,' and 'In the Bush,' meaning the bush in Australia, where many British and Irish at the time were emigrating.[49] Not rarely, articles related to discovery and colonisation are marked by a latent and sometimes open racism. Africans are presented as naturally less civilised than Europeans. As the 'Phantom Ship' article on 'Negro-Land' told its readers, they were also "eager for instruction from the white man's wisdom."[50] And in the article about the Franklin search expedition, "esquimeaux" were just as naturally taken to be unreliable witnesses. Dickens's readers were made aware of the peculiarities of their own insularity,[51] but this insularity also ensured their superiority to the European neighbours which the new affordable tourism made accessible also for the middle-class traveller. The British battlefield tourist at Waterloo suffered from Belgian ignorance,[52] and the British tourist on the Rhine was inconvenienced by Germany's division into many petty states, each with their own currency so that the traveller was robbed in the process of exchange:

> Smith and family had changed English gold for Belgian silver and German copper, and they had found some difficulty in solving the knotty problem, 'How to make it right?' They had stopped, too, at Belgian and at Rhine hotels, and had been still more puzzled than ever by the mysterious reckonings sometimes made in German florins of two shillings; they had tried in vain to unravel the difficulty of kreutzers and silber groschen, of thalers and gulden, and more than all, to make up their minds what could be

48 The idea of the penny-post was not introduced until January 1840, and the Penny Black and Two Pence Blue as the world's first postage stamps were not introduced until May of that year.

49 *Household Words* no. 39. During its first years, *Household Words* printed many articles related to emigration and life in Australia.

50 *Household Words* no. 43 (18 January 1851), pp. 400 – 7.

51 'Insularities'*Household Words* no. 304 (19 January 1856), pp. 1 – 4; written by Dickens himself. On the various ways in which *Household Words* negotiated nationhood see also Clemm, Sabine (2009), *Dickens, Journalism and Nationhood: Mapping the World in* Household Words, London: Routledge.

52 'A Day at Waterloo' *Household Words* no. 75 (30 August 1851), pp. 539 – 44, written by William Howitt.

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> the values of the numberless varieties of little dirty coins they received in change for their handsome English gold.[53]

Whether tourism, pollution or the social question: Dickens's magazines addressed the challenges of change encountered by mid-Victorian Britons in many walks of life. And there were many other cultural themes through which the *HW* and *AYR* navigated their readers: the workings of the human body and medical progress in anaesthetics, seasickness and insanity, fossils and fossil hunting, diving bells and screw propellers, kinder gardens, herbs and vegetables, the blunders of politicians, the benefits of public libraries, photography, and spiritualism. Some of these miscellaneous subjects were delightful and amusing, others perplexing and troubling. As comrades and friends, *HW* and *AYR* suggested how the Victorian world could be read, understood and coped with: with humour, compassion for others, and with recourse to major beliefs and values of Victorian culture: progress, civilisation, patriotism and middle-class responsibilities. In this respect, Dickens' magazines, like other periodicals of the time – performed important cultural work. But unlike other editors, Dickens used his role as conductor to construct a common voice for his magazines. The most characteristically Dickensian quality of the magazines is arguably their insistence on the role of the imagination and the fanciful reading they offer of Victorian culture. Dreams and fancy are an important motif in Dickens's novels – as *Hard Times* exemplifies most outspokenly – but also in the journalism of his magazines: Readers are taken on phantom ships, meet the ghost of the Thames, and see their post-office as a place of magic. The importance which Dickens accorded to "the light of Fancy" in his 'Preliminary Word' to *Household Words* encourages an imaginative approach to the mid-Victorian world also on the part of the readers – an *active* approach in which the world is mentally processed and re-imagined in a way that brings it closer to the social vision that Dickens evoked in the 'Preliminary Word': to be "tolerant of one another" (at least within the limits of one's own society), to be "faithful in the progress of mankind," and "thankful for the privilege of living in this summer-dawn of time."

53 'The Modern Robbers of the Rhine' *Household Words* no. 30 (19 October 1850), pp. 90–3; written by Frederick Knight Hunt.

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Saverio Tomaiuolo (Cassino)

3.4 'A Pretty Fair Scholar in Dust': Recycling the Sensation Novel in *Our Mutual Friend*

Charles Dickens's nurse Mary Weller is reputed as the person who introduced him to the secrets and to the appeal of storytelling. In some respects, the ways in which she captured little Charley's imagination also help to understand Dickens's future fascination with crime, mysteries and with sensational narratives. 'Nurse's Stories' is one of the first childhood tales Dickens remembers, and recounts the infamous tale of Captain Murderer. This diabolical character, "who must have been an offshoot of the Blue Beard family," used to gratify his "cannibal appetite with tender brides." Soon after the marriage feast was over, Captain Murderer (a name that must have sounded a bit suspect to brides) asked the bride to make a pie for him, producing "a silver pie-dish of immense capacity" along with butter, eggs, "and all things needful, except the inside of the pie." When the "lovely bride" asked him what pie was it to be, Captain Murderer used to reply: "Look in the glass." After having cut his bride's head off, the Captain "chopped her in pieces, and peppered her, and salted her, and put her in the pie, and sent it to the baker's, and ate it all, and picked the bones." After having killed an unspecified number of wives, Captain Murderer met two twin sisters, the fair one loving him and the dark one hating him. As for the fair one, everything went as usual: the bride was killed and then eaten. But the dark bride, who suspected what her tragic destiny would be, brought the Captain's cannibalistic meals to an end. Before rolling the paste for her meat pie, she decided to take "a deadly poison of a most awful character, distilled from toads' eyes and spiders' knees." After having eaten the pie and picked his last bride's bones, Captain Murderer "began to swell, and to turn blue, and to be all over spots, and to scream […], until he reached from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall; and then, at one o'clock in the morning, he blew up with a loud explosion." As the narrator confesses, his nurse's name "was Mercy, though she had none on [him]."[1]

1 Dickens, Charles (1985), *Selected Short Fiction*, ed. Deborah A. Thomas, Harmondsworth:

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This brief summary shows how 'Nurse's Stories' includes *in nuce* many ingredients of the sensational recipe, namely marital violence, murder, and poisoning. Indeed many critics have concentrated on the criminally and disturbingly sensational aspect of Dickens's art and, as Harry Stone asserts, "on that side of the planet Dickens which is turned from the sun."[2] But, whereas Dickens is reputed as one of the fathers of the sensation genre and, according to Victorian reviewers and critics, as the founder of the so-called 'Dickens school,' novels such as *Great Expectations* (1861), the unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) and in particular his last completed fiction *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), which will be the object of my analysis, are heavily based on the codes of the sensation genre and draw many elements from it.[3] In this respect, my essay will first investigate the 'mutual' intertextual dialogue between Dickens and sensationalism, and then will approach *Our Mutual Friend* as a meta-literary reflection on novel writing and plot making. Finally, relying on one of the pervading metaphors of the novel, *Our Mutual Friend* will be studied as a text that foregrounds Dickens's ability to recycle 'trashy' and 'discarded' sensational pieces, turning them into great works of art.

It is a critical truism to assert that Dickens always showed a great curiosity in the darkest recesses of the human psyche. If on the one hand, he could not resist the temptation of witnessing the hanging of the Swiss valet Courvoisier on 6 July 1840 (in company of 40,000 people) and of the notorious Maria Manning (plus her husband) on 13 November 1849, on the other hand he had contradictory opinions and feelings on capital punishment and on life imprisoning. In 'The Demeanour of Murderers,' for instance, he blames William Palmer's "complete self possession" (the surgeon had been accused of poisoning 16 people), whereas in 'A Visit to Newgate,' an article included in *Sketches by Boz* (1836), he details his visit to the prison in 1836 and denounces the terrible conditions of its inmates.[4]

Penguin, pp. 221 – 23. The piece was originally published in *All the Year Round* (September 8, 1860), and then included in *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1861).

2 Stone, Harry (1994), *The Night Side of Dickens. Cannibalism, Passion and Necessity*, Columbus / OH: Ohio State UP, p. xxii. Stone's study, for instance, concentrates in particular on Dickens's interest in the "unpardonable sin" of cannibalism, and traces this interest back to his nurse's tales and to Dickens's reading (as a twelve year-old boy) of weeklies such as the *Terrific Register*, "an apt named periodical specialized in gore and sensationalism" (p. 64).

3 Winifred Hughes states that "Dickens found himself in the old position of being both forerunner and imitator of the sensational vogue […]. Although Dickens objected to Collins's tendency to stitch to the plotline […], it has become a critical commonplace that the tighter plotting and criminal secrets of his late novels […] can be partly traced to the influence of Collins and of the sensational genre." Hughes, Winifred (2005), 'The Sensation Novel' *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Patrick Brantlinger / William B. Thesing, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 272 – 73.

4 Dickens, Charles (1856), 'The Demeanour of Murderers' *Household Words*, 14 June, p. 505. As for the public execution of the Mannings, in a letter to *The Times* dated 14 November 1849

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Dickens was to continue in his exploration of criminality in his Newgate fiction-inspired *Oliver Twist* (1838) through the character of Fagin, in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840) in his depiction of the bodily and morally grotesque Quilp, and in his following novels, short stories and journalistic articles. *Bleak House* represents the *trait d'union* between the previous narrations focused on the criminal underworld and the multi-plotted investigations on family secrets penned by Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Because of his love of the theatre, considered by him as an important form of popular entertainment, Dickens's use of melodramatic techniques – which turned private emotions into visible acts – contributed to the creation of his fascinating villains and anticipated many sensationalistic narrative strategies.[5] Nevertheless, although Victorian reviewers labelled sensational writers as members of 'the Dickens school,' Dickens did not particularly like his affiliation with sensationalism, as his complex editorial relationship with Charles Reade and his mixed opinions on Wilkie Collins's fictions testify. Charles Reade's *Very Hard Cash* (later changed in *Hard Cash*), for instance, not only caused a drop in the sales of *All the Year Round*, in which it was serialised in 1863 – 1864, but had also raised the issue of the inhuman treatment of insane in lunatic asylums. This caused Dickens much embarrassment, since he repeatedly praised psychiatrist John Conolly (who inspired the corrupt asylum keeper Dr. Wycherley in Reade's novel) and because his friend John Forster was a lunacy commissioner. Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), which appeared alongside *Great Expectations* (a novel that included the sensationally 'excessive' character of Miss Havisham), boosted the sales of *All the Year Round*, cementing the collaboration and friendship between Collins and Dickens. At the same time, Dickens would later write that he found the construction of Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) "wearisome beyond endurance, and there is a vein of obstinate conceit in it that makes enemies of readers."[6] In turn,

Dickens writes that he was disgusted by "the wickedness and levity of the immense crowd collected at the execution [at Horsemonger Lane]," composed of "thieves, low prostitutes, ruffians and vagabonds of every kind." *The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens 1847 – 49*, vol. 5, ed. Graham Storey et al., Oxford / New York: Oxford UP, 1981, pp. 644 – 45. As readers know, the character of Mademoiselle Hortense in *Bleak House* (1854) is inspired by Maria Manning.

5 "From the interpolated tales of *The Pickwick Papers* to the unfinished novel *Edwin Drood*, the melodramatic, violent villain is the site through which Dickens explores the relationship between passion, interiority, and deviance, and the self-reflexive implications of this relationship for the art of the popular writer." John, Juliet (2001), *Dickens's Villains*, Oxford / New York: Oxford UP, p. 96. As Mirella Billi puts it, "[it] was in particular in stage melodrama […] that Dickens found inspiration for most of his sensationalism." Billi, Mirella (2000), 'Dickens as Sensational Novelist' *Dickens: The Craft of Fiction and the Challenges of Reading*, ed. Rossana Bonadei et al., Milan: Unicopli, p. 181.

6 Letter to Willis, dated 26 July 1868, in Dickens, Charles (2002), *The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens* 1868 – 1870, vol. 12, ed. Graham Storey et al., Oxford / New York:

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The Mystery of Edwin Drood borrows many themes and elements from Collins's *The Moonstone*, and was intended by Dickens as an attempt to outclass the success of his friend's and colleague's novel.

First and foremost, Dickens's way of recounting the genealogy of crimes, and his peculiar editorial politics, had an enormous impact on would-be sensation novelists such as his protégée Wilkie Collins, Mary Elisabeth Braddon, Mrs. Henry (Ellen) Wood, Charles Reade, and many others. Indeed, Dickens was among the pioneers of an aggressive editorial strategy based on serial writing, which he practised in his popular magazines *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. Apart from the fact that these periodicals were cheaper than others (*All the Year Round*, for instance, had a 24-page, double-columned format and was sold at two pennies), their real novelty was that they hosted serial publications by leading writers. Although it was indebted to *Household Words* in its editorial style, *All the Year Round* focused on publishing entertaining literature rather than including works dealing with social issues. Whereas Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) exemplify the aims of *Household Words*, Collins's *No Name* (1862) and Dickens's *Great Expectations* summarise the 'sensational' features of *All the Year Round*. Moreover, a great number of developments in printing techniques, the 1855 repeal of the newspaper tax and the 1861 repeal of the paper tax marked important turning-points in the birth of a new wave of Victorian magazines, including *Cornhill* (1860), initially edited by W.M. Thackeray, *Belgravia* (1866), directed by Mary Elisabeth Braddon, and *Argosy* (whose editorship in 1867 passed in the hands of Mrs. Wood, another leading female sensationalist). It is to be noticed that all of these magazines included sensational tales and journalistic pieces written either by their own editors or by famous contributors. Finally, Dickens's family journal *All the Year Round* succeeded in making 'scandalous' topics such as murder, criminality, intrigues, secrets, and unlawful *liaisons* (which were previously published in low-quality cheap miscellanies) acceptable to a middle-class audience. To quote from William Fraser Rae, who refers to Braddon, Dickens made "the literature of the kitchen the favourite reading of the drawing room."[7] What was more, in

Oxford UP, p. 159. On Dickens's relationship with Collins, see in particular Lonoff, Sue (1980), 'Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins' *Nineteenth-Century Fictions* 35, pp. 150 – 70 and Nayder, Lillian (2002), *Unequal Partners. Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship*, Ithaca / London: Cornell UP.

7 Rae, W.F. (1865), 'Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon' *North British Review* 43, p. 204. Debrah Wynne writes that *All the Year Round* "was organised as a vehicle for entertaining literature, where the serialisation of popular novels […] was the magazine's priority." Wynne, Debrah (2001), *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, p. 23. For Beth Palmer, Dickens "helped in three significant ways to form the press conditions that enabled Braddon, Wood and Marryat to succeed as author-editors. He rehabilitated fiction serialisation, linked author and editor into a celebrity persona, and orchestrated his con-

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order to adapt himself to the format of his periodicals, Dickens had to change his writing style and his narrative organisation to keep up the pace with serial writing. He had, in a way, to cut his stories into coherent bits and pieces, and to reassemble them according to the closure (and successive opening) of each instalment. His sensational disciples, who sometimes outclassed their master in plot construction, imitated his lesson.

Our Mutual Friend was written and published when the success of sensation fictions was at its zenith. The novel includes many elements derived from sensationalism: double/exchanged identities (John Harmon aka John Rokesmith aka Julius Handford), dysfunctional families (The Lammles, the Hexams), an almost-psychotic villain of respectable origin (Bradley Headstone), a formerly corrupted lawyer who later redeems himself (Eugene Wrayburn), the presence of a detective (the Night Inspector), a gothic urban setting (London), insatiable greed (Silas Wegg), mysterious legacies involving a contested inheritance, and murder.[8] First and foremost, the 'proximity' of the story to the times in which it was published, which was blamed by critics of Collins and Braddon such as Rev. Henry Longueville Mansel as "one great element of sensation," is immediately put into the foreground by the narrator:

> In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in.[9]

The opening of *Our Mutual Friend* seems to be an ironic lesson in sensation, characterised by images of corruption (the boat is "dirty and disreputable") and

tributors to perform further versions of the persona he had created through style and content choices." Palmer, Beth (2011), *Women's Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture: Sensational Strategies*, Oxford / New York: Oxford UP, p. 30.

8 Lisa Surrige studies the ways in which Dickens deployed and altered sensational paradigms. According to Surrige, in *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens "uses the sensational figure of the *mort vivant* less to excite suspense (as in *Lady Audley's Secret*), to create a sensation of the uncanny (as in *The Woman in White*), or to represent social exclusion (as in *East Lynne*), than to project a fantasy of life outside capitalism and patrilineal structures, outside the 'will' of the father and the restrictions of social class." Surrige, Lisa (1998), 'John Rokesmith's Secret: Sensation, Detection and the Policing of the Feminine in *Our Mutual Friend*' *Dickens Studies Annual* 26, p. 267. Talia Shaffer argues that, like the lazy proto-aesthete Robert Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret*, at the end of the novel Eugene Wrayburn "becomes a conventionally appropriate middle-class male, hard-working, and happily married." Shaffer, Talia (2011), 'Aestheticism and Sensation' *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. Pamela K. Gilbert, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 619.

9 Dickens, Charles (1988), *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Michael Cotsell, Oxford / New York: Oxford UP, p. 1. Further references will be from this edition, with books, chapters and pages parenthetically given. H.L. Mansel's words are from his review entitled 'Sensation Novels' *Quarterly Review* 113, p. 488.

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by an explicit reference to the 'proximity' of the events ("In these times of ours"). Whereas in sensation fictions murders and missing bodies represented the climax of narrations, here the fishing of John Harmon's (supposed) corpse in the Thames is the premise of the story. Unlike traditional sensation fictions, which tended to delay the revelation of the mystery at the end of the tale, in Dickens's novel the real identity of Julius Handford/John Rokesmith is revealed to readers as early as in chapter XIII. This deliberate narrative strategy is confirmed by Dickens in the 'Postscript' to *Our Mutual Friend*, in which he writes that "[when he] devised this story, [he] foresaw the likelihood that a class of readers and commentators would suppose that [he] was at great pains to conceal exactly what [he] was at great pains to suggest: namely, that Mr. John Harmon was not slain, and that Mr. Rokesmith was he," adding that he did not feel "alarmed by the anticipation" (p. 821). Even the presentation of what the narrator calls 'The Harmon Murder' is reminiscent of the popular craze over sensational trials, which became the source of inspiration for many sensational plots:

> Thus, like the tides on which it had been borne to the knowledge of men, the Harmon Murder – as it came to be popularly called – went up and down, and ebbed and flowed, now in the town, now in the country, now among palaces, now among hovels, now among lords and ladies and gentlefolks, now among labourers and hammerers and ballast-heavers, until at last, after a long interval of slack water it got out to sea and drifted away (p. 31).

But Dickens's last completed novel is more than this. In truth, *Our Mutual Friend* dramatises the struggle to recycle a dispersed identity, and to profit from the economic 'use' of a dead man. After a long trial, made of sufferance (experienced, each in a different way, by John Harmon, Eugene Wrayburn, Lizzie Hexam, Jenny Wren and Mr. Venus) and deceit (John Harmon's and Noddy Boffin's "pious fraud"), *Our Mutual Friend* suggests that a new hope in the future and a new regeneration will derive from waste (the dust heaps) and from a nameless decomposing corpse. This is the reason why, according to critics, the Thames and the London waste function both as means of destruction and as regenerating elements, an amniotic fluid in which life may be given again, or at least recycled.

The villain Bradley Headstone, a man destroyed by a consuming passion who shares many traits with the love-mad John Jasper in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, is the most sensational character of the story. In depicting him, Dickens was partially inspired by the notorious 'Northumberland Street Affair' (involving an Army Major, his beautiful mistress and an unscrupulous moneylender), which captured public attention in July 1861 and which inspired, in turn, many sensation novels. In particular, the hand-to-hand fight between Bradley Headstone and Eugene Wrayburn is reminiscent of the brutal confrontation which took

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place at number 16 Northumberland Street, and which cost the moneylender his life.[10] Although Dickens had already introduced peculiar schoolteachers in his previous novels, from Mr Creakle (the harsh headmaster of David's boarding school in *David Copperfield*) and Doctor Blimber in *Dombey and Son* (who runs the school in Brighton which Paul attends) to Mr M'Choakumchild (the unpleasant teacher at Gradgrind's school in *Hard Times*), he characterises Bradley Headstone as "a very abnormal psychological case."[11] In depicting him, Dickens deploys melodramatic techniques that show the permeability of Headstone's inner feelings, according to what Peter Brooks has defined, in his study *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976), as 'the mode of excess:'

> The dark look of hatred and revenge with which the words broke from his livid lips, and with which he stood holding out his smeared hand as if it held some weapon and had just struck a mortal blow, made her so afraid of him that she turned to run away. But he caught [Lizzie Hexam] by the arm (p. 398).
>
> [Bradley Headstone] drooped his devoted head when the boy was gone, and shrank together on the floor, and grovelled there, with the palms of his hands tight-clasping his hot temples, in unutterable misery, and unrelieved by a single tear (p. 713).

Similarly to many sensational characters, Rogue Riderhood comes back from the dead (he miraculously survives "through drowning") and conceals many secrets, which will die with him. Finally, Headstone and Riderhood share a violent and tragic destiny, since these evil and corrupted brothers in crime will both perish in water, drowning together in another sensational scene of the novel.

As for its general narrative structure, *Our Mutual Friend* shares the typical strategy of limiting narrative omniscience – adopted to conceal and delay important information for as long as possible – which was peculiar to sensation novels (and detective stories). Whereas the textual echoes from Collins's *The Woman in White*, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) are quite explicit, Dickens's novel seems also to imitate and to take inspiration from 'lurid' sensational tales (as critics labelled them), such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Trail of the Serpent* (1861), a novel that includes poisoning, murder, exchange of identities, an incarceration into an asylum, a morally corrupting Parisian setting, an exceptionally evil villain and multiple resuscitations. Originally entitled *Three Times Dead. Or The Secret of the Hearth*, this was Braddon's first written and published novel (it was issued by C.R. Empson in Beverley in 27 weekly parts in 1860) which she was later to revise,

10 Altick, Richard (1986), *Deadly Encounters. Two Victorian Sensations*, Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P.

11 Collins, Philip (1964), *Dickens and Crime*, London: Macmillan, p. 285.

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following the advice of her editor and future husband John Maxwell. Braddon's enthusiastic readership was large and included, along with hundreds of detractors, also eminent literary figures such as Alfred Lord Tennyson, W.M. Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, R.L. Stevenson, Henry James, Oscar Wilde, and first-rate politicians. It is thus highly probable that Dickens was one of the readers of Braddon's first novel (although he probably read *The Trail of the Serpent*, instead of *Three Times Dead*).

Most of *The Trail of the Serpent* takes place in the small provincial town of Slopperton-on-the-Sloshy, where the schoolteacher Jabez North (a foundling) lives an apparently virtuous life. In effect, he is a greedy and unscrupulous man who, after poisoning one of his students, kills and robs Montague Hardin – who has just come back from India with enormous riches – and succeeds in having Hardin's nephew Richard Marwood blamed for the murder. The only person who is sure of Richard's innocence is the dumb police detective Joseph Peters (in many ways reminiscent of Dickens's Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*), who convinces Richard to avoid capital punishment by feigning madness. A woman, who is the mother of Jabez's son and who now lives in poverty, is brutally rejected by Jabez; for this reason she throws herself and her baby into the Sloshy river. Peters, who decides to adopt him and to call him 'Sloshy,' rescues the baby (here Braddon takes inspiration from William Harrison Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*, which features a rescued baby who is christened 'Times' after the river). After killing a man named Jim Lomax who had a great resemblance to him and who he had chanced to meet one day in a poor suburb, Jabez (who is believed by everybody to be dead) moves to Paris with the new name of Raymond, Count de Marolles. Having escaped from the madhouse, Richard Marwood joins a group of amateur investigators named the 'Cherokees' (inspired by the 'Bow Street Runners'), which includes a pugilist and Sloshy. Their aim is to catch Jabez North/Count de Marolles. The final scenes are set on a boat sailing from Liverpool to America, where Jabez takes refuge in a coffin to escape the 'Cherokees.' After being arrested by Peters, who has collected a great amount of evidence against him, in order to avoid capital punishment Jabez North commits suicide and dies for the third, and last, time. Apart from the influence of G.W.M. Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London* (1845), inspired by Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, by Alexander Dumas's works (for the description of the Parisian setting), by detective Vidoq's *Memories* (1828), by Newgate Novels (including *Oliver Twist* and *Jack Sheppard*), Braddon anticipates Dickens's pervasive use of the water imagery in *Our Mutual Friend.* Like the Thames, which for Dickens is a destructive as well as a rejuvenating natural force, the overflowing, 'muddy' and deadly river Sloshy becomes a paradigm of the moral waste that corrupts society:

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> The Sloshy is not a beautiful river, unless indeed mud is beautiful, for it is very muddy. The Sloshy is a disagreeable kind of compromise between a river and a canal. It is like a canal which […] had seen a river, and swelled itself to bursting in imitation thereof. It has quite a knack of swelling and bursting, this Sloshy; it overflows its banks and swallows up a house or two, or takes an impromptu snack off a few outbuildings, once or twice a year. It is inimical to children, and has been known to suck into its muddy bosom the hopes of divers families; and has afterwards gone down to the distant sea […].
>
> An ugly, dark, and dangerous river — a river that is always telling you of trouble, and anguish, and weariness of spirit — a river that to some poor impressionable mortal creatures, who are apt to be saddened by a cloud or brightened by a sunbeam — is not healthy to look upon.[12]

In *The Trail of the Serpent* and *Our Mutual Friend*, the villain is a respected local schoolteacher (although the character of Jabez North in Braddon is more rational and less impulsive than Bradley Headstone), and the two novels introduce two important figures of foundlings who share a similar name: 'Sloshy' (after the river in Slopperton) and 'Sloppy.' It is interesting to notice that Braddon's Sloshy in the course of the novel becomes an amateur detective working with the police, and that Dickens's Sloppy is "a beautiful reader" of newspapers and does "the Police in different voices" (p. 198).

This brief reference to Braddon's hyper-sensational tale proves that Dickens was accustomed to sensational narrative strategies, and was not afraid of borrowing from all literary and non-literary sources, including the so-called 'trashy' novels of the 1860s. It is significant, in this sense, that sensation fictions (and, generally speaking, the so-called 'popular literature') were usually associated by many critics to a discarded form of narrative art and to a narrative 'trash,' which is a recurring image and metaphor in *Our Mutual Friend*. Henry Longueville Mansel, for instance, blamed the sensation novel for being the sign of a "widespread corruption" which was "called into existence to supply the cravings of a diseased appetite," adding that "be it mere *trash* or something worse, is usually a tale of out times." *The Evangelical Magazine*, in an article dated 1866, asks the following question:

> Are those books which [readers devour] so eagerly sensation fictions or good substantial works, full of solid information and of right sentiments? We by no means prohibit all fiction, but we cannot condemn too strongly much of the *trash* which form the daily issues forth from the press.[13]

12 Braddon, Mary Elizabeth (2003), *The Trail of the Serpent*, ed. Chris Willis, New York: The Modern Library, p. 32.

13 Mansel, H.L. (1863), p. 488. Anonymous, 'Character: How it is Formed and What is it Worth?' *The Evangelical Magazine*, p. 376.

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As far as *Our Mutual Friend* is concerned, dust, waste and trash (and the all-compassing watery presence of the Thames) have been reputed by critics as metaphors for the moral and bodily corruption brought by money and greed in nineteenth-century London.[14] In this respect, the dust imagery in *Our Mutual Friend*, and its corollary of individuals directly or indirectly related to it, may be also approached as a meta-literary reflection on the job of the writer, and on Dickens's job in particular. Like Nicodemus Boffin, Dickens is a 'Golden Dustman' who recycles 'trashy' literary genres and sources, and turns them from waste into gold:

> 'Ay, ay, that's another thing. I may sell THEM, though I should be sorry to see the neighbourhood deprived of 'em too. It'll look but a poor dead flat without the Mounds. Still I don't say that I'm going to keep 'em always there, for the sake of the beauty of the landscape. There's no hurry about it; that's all I say at present. I ain't a scholar in much, Rokesmith, but *I'm a pretty fair scholar in dust.* I can price the Mounds to a fraction, and I know how they can be best disposed of; and likewise that they take no harm by standing where they do' (p. 185, my italics).

Dickens may be therefore imagined as another "pretty fair scholar in dust" who skillfully deals with various and "diverse'" linguistic units that form a great (literary) property, and knows "how they can be best disposed of." As a Victorian writer who earned his living from literature, he was able to profit from his serial publications, composed as they were of divided pieces, and could "price the Mounds to a fraction" like Boffin. Dickens may be compared to Boffin (and John Harmon) in other respects, because he represents the very creator of the plot and of the fictional "pious fraud" of *Our Mutual Friend*, which involves Bella Wilfer, Silas Wegg, Mr. Venus and, indirectly, Eugene Wrayburn and Lizzie Hexam. Finally, Boffin is an accomplished actor who likes to play different roles. In particular, he repeatedly rehearses the part of the pompous and presumptuous well-to-do (and succeeds in doing so). Noddy Boffin is a great performer like Dickens, who was reputed a first-rate actor and a great impersonator, in particular during his public readings.[15] Despite the fact that Boffin's and John Harmon's plots have different aims (the former wants to save Bella from her own

14 In Alexander Welsh's opinion, the dust heaps, "their supposed value in pounds, shillings, and pence, and the fact that 'dust' is a euphemism for several varieties of human waste, tempt the psychoanalytic critic to relate money […] to excrement." Welsh, Alexander (1999), *The City of Dickens*, Cambridge / MA: Harvard UP, p. 68. Jeremy Tambling argues that *Our Mutual Friend* "shows fascination throughout with the heterogeneous – with waste, with the river, the criminal." Tambling, Jeremy (2009), *Going Astray. Dickens and London*, London: Pearson, p. 254.

15 As Anny Sadrin writes, Boffin is "not only a medium for the narrator, a storyteller, a stage director and a *deus-ex-machina:* he is above all an instructor and a moralist." Sadrin, Amnne, *Parentage and Inheritance in the Novels of Charles Dickens*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 144.

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greed, the latter wishes to transform a pre-arranged marriage into a sentimental bond) they both contribute in putting the narrative of *Our Mutual Friend* in motion.

This analysis of *Our Mutual Friend* as a meta-literary reflection on novel writing is supported by the fact that many of its most important characters are manufacturers of art or 'creators:' namely Silas Wegg, Mr Venus, and Jenny Wren.[16] All of them are refractions of Charles Dickens and of his opinions on literary creation. First and foremost, Silas Wegg the ballad-monger – described by Henry Mayhew in *London Labour and the London Poor* as the "pinner-up" or "wall-song seller" – is an image of the artist who sells himself to money (and accepts to work for uneducated patrons like Noddy Boffin), and of the difficulties writers had to face to survive only thanks to their literary job. Finally, Wegg embodies the sham artist and the corrupted intellectual (in his attempt to blackmail Noddy). Through the figure of the 'popular' artist Silas Wegg, the "literary man with a wooden leg," Dickens quotes from, and parodies, a great quantity of known (and lesser-known) ballads and literary pieces, engaging readers in a form of literary detection:

> Over against a London house, a corner house not far from Cavendish Square, a man with a wooden leg had sat for some years, with his remaining foot in a basket in cold weather, picking up a living on this wise: – Every morning at eight o'clock, he stumped to the corner, carrying a chair, a clothes-horse, a pair of trestles, a board, a basket, and an umbrella, all strapped together […], the unfolded clothes-horse displayed a choice collection of halfpenny ballads and became a screen, and the stool planted within it became his post for the rest of the day […]. A howling corner in the winter time, a dusty corner in the summer time, an undesirable corner at the best of times. (p. 44)

Mr Venus represents another refracted figure for the artist/Dickens. Differently from Silas, this pathetic character is a more romantic expression of creativity, and of the necessity of being sentimentally reciprocated. Inspired by a real shop assistant that Dickens met at St Giles' after Marcus Stone – his illustrator at the time – suggested to him to visit a taxidermist's shop, the compulsive tea-drinking Mr Venus gives new life to dead objects. Like Dickens, Mr Venus recycles useless and discarded materials (in Dickens's case, more or less respectable literary sources such as the sensation novel) to create works of art. Similarly to artists, he approaches his activity as collector and articulator of heterogeneous products according to a metonymic process. Silas Wegg's missing limb, for instance, represents a metonym for his precarious identity as a man

16 Michael Cotsell suggests that *Our Mutual Friend* "provides a number of figures of the artist: all of those who transform waste for a living, and most notably the comically and pathetically limited taxidermist Venus and the weirdly fanciful and satirical Jenny Wren." 'Introduction' to Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend,* p. xvi.

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and an artist, to the point that – while searching for his 'lost' leg – Silas asks Venus "Where am I?" (p. 82).[17] Braddon offers a similar reflection of the role of the 'disembodied' artist in *The Doctor's Wife* (1864), a very free translation of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856). Here she introduces Sigismund Smith, a sensation novelist who tries to earn a life only by means of his job as a writer, and who lives (like Silas Wegg) as a 'dismembered' individual. Sigismund is introduced by Braddon as a person who "had never in his life presented himself before the public in a complete form" and "he appeared in weekly numbers at a penny, and was always so appearing," because his public "bought its literature in the same manner as its pudding – *in penny slices*."[18] It is not coincidental that Silas Wegg allies himself to Mr Venus, who is a very skillful 'assembler,' to regain his lost identity. Like the taxidermist, who works with single anatomical elements as parts standing for the whole, artists use words as components standing for a representation of reality or, in John Carey's words, as its "effigy." Furthermore, Mr Venus's job as a taxidermist stands for Dickens's activity as a writer and an editor, who was able to 'compose' a series of apparently disjointed literary pieces (the single instalments of a novel) in an organic whole (a novel).

Jenny Wren, the dolls' dressmaker, stands as another embodiment of the figure of the artist. She can create little masterpieces that are an 'effigies' of reality, can sing beautifully, has ecstatic visions and, like Dickens, is a great coiner of names (she calls Riah "Fairy Godmother," Mr. Fledgeby "Little Eyes" and she has even changed her real name, which originally was Fanny Cleaver). Her job may be easily associated with that of Mr Venus, since their occupations – in Katherine Inglis's view – "give them a privileged view of the human frame as a composite of fragments which can be decomposed and reconstituted."[19] Similarly to Mr Venus (who finally wins the love of Pleasant Riderhood, Rogue's daughter), at the end of the novel Jenny is emotionally rewarded by Sloppy, who will probably marry her. Like Dickens, Jenny is keen on reproducing little

17 Goldie Morgentaler writes that "as a purveyor of ballads and paid reader to Mr. Boffin, Silas, like his creator, makes a living from literature […]. Silas's wish to buy back his amputated leg, because he objects to being 'dispersed,' speaks directly to Dickens's understanding of identity and the way in which identity is inscribed onto the body." Morgentaler, Goldie (2005), 'Dickens and the Scattered Identity of Silas Wegg' *Dickens Quarterly* 22, p. 92.

18 Braddon, Mary Elisabeth (1998), *The Doctor's Wife*, ed. Lyn Pykett, Oxford /New York: Oxford UP, pp. 11 – 12, my italics.

19 Inglis, Catherine (2008), 'Becoming Automatons: Automata in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Our Mutual Friend*' *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 6, p. 21. For an analysis of Jenny as a 'maker' and artist, see Stewart, Garrett (1973), 'The "Golden Bower" of *Our Mutual Friend*' *ELH* 40, in particular pp. 111 – 13. For John Glavin, Jenny Wren and Mr Venus are "artist-artisans" like Dickens. Glavin, John (1999), *After Dickens. Reading, Adaptation and Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 53.

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miniatures and on creating parodic figurations of human beings and of "gaily-dressed ladies, making them unconsciously lay-figures for dolls" (p. 724), which she manipulates with her "nimble fingers" (p. 222).

In a typical Dickensian fashion, *Our Mutual Friend* includes a comic satire on upper-middle class society and on British self-pompous attitudes, whose mouthpiece is none other than John Podsnap, inspired by his friend (and future biographer) John Forster. Podsnap gives Dickens the occasion to include a meta-literary ironic commentary on literary tastes, and in particular on the critical debates against sensation novels (supported by those who advocated the 'morality' of realism). The association between the improbabilities of sensational narratives and the moral irregularities they depicted was supported by a great host of reviewers, including the abovementioned Henry L. Mansel and William Fraser Rae, along with Margaret Oliphant, one of the most acrimonious opponents to the sensational genre. In an article published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in September 1867, entitled 'Novels,' Oliphant criticises the deleterious teachings of those (sensation) novels that feature "*unseemly* references and exhibitions of forbidden knowledge."[20] Critics like Oliphant associated artistic morality with the minute description of ordinary activities and duties (rather than extraordinary, uncommon and sensational events). Podsnap seems therefore to echo, in a hyperbolic way, these critical assumptions on the alleged 'neatness,' 'cleanliness' and 'solidity' of realistic literature when he illustrates his own aesthetic principles:

> Mr. Podsnap's notions of the Arts in their integrity might have been stated thus. Literature; large print, respectfully descriptive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven (p. 128).

It is somewhat fitting that, during the composition of this novel, Dickens was involved in a famous railway crash, and became the protagonist of a sensational tale of death and rescue.[21] On 9 June 1865 he was travelling with Ellen Ternan and her mother in the front, first class, carriage of the so-called 'boat train,' which was carrying passengers from France to London Charing Cross. Due to a technical misunderstanding (related to the timing of the train) the final two rails of a low cast iron girder bridge over the River Beult, near Staplehurst (in Kent), had not been replaced yet. It was impossible for the driver to stop the train in time. Most of the carriages fell into the river, 10 passengers died and 40 were injured. Dickens was among the few passengers who survived (actually his carriage

20 Oliphant, Margaret (1867), 'Novels' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 102, p. 258.

21 Railway crashes were used by sensational novelists such as Mrs. Wood (in *East Lynne*), Braddon (in *John Marchmont's Legacy*) and Collins (in *No Name*) as important turning points in their plots.

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remained hanging over the bridge). According to reports and witnesses, he showed a great courage. First, he helped the Ternans to leave the upturned carriage, and then he gave aid to dying and injured passengers who were lying at the bottom of the riverbed. But when Dickens was about to leave the scene of death and destruction at Staplehurst, he realised that he had forgotten something: the manuscript of *Our Mutual Friend* that was still in the pocket of his overcoat. In a cold-blooded gesture, he re-entered the swaying carriage and rescued it. Here are Dickens's very words on what happened, included in his famous 'Postscript' to *Our Mutual Friend:*

> On Friday the Ninth of June in the present year, Mr and Mrs Boffin (in their manuscript dress of receiving Mr and Mrs Lammle at breakfast) were on the South Eastern Railway with me, in a terribly destructive accident. When I had done what I could to help others, I climbed back into my carriage – nearly turned over a viaduct, and caught aslant upon the turn – to extricate the worthy couple. They were much soiled, but otherwise unhurt. The same happy result attended Miss Bella Wilfer on her wedding day, and Mr Riderhood inspecting Bradley Headstone's red neckerchief as he lay asleep ('Postscript, in lieu of Preface,' p. 822).

Using a seemingly meta-narrative vocabulary, Dickens affectionately compares his 'manuscript' characters to creatures made of paper ("soiled but otherwise unhurt"). Not only had he saved from 'dust' and ruin what would be his last completed novel, similarly centred on 'dust' and ruin. What was more, he would finally succeed in turning a sensational and shocking biographic event into a great tale of human and artistic regeneration.

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3.5 *Oliver Twist*, the Perils of Child Identity and the Emergence of the Victorian Child

Charles Dickens is both a book and a world, a writer whose literary representations of the moral, social and political realities of his time at once mirrored and helped create the Victorian era. In this Dickens was the author of more than an expansive body of literary texts; for his own and subsequent generations, he was also the author of the popular understanding of his age. One of his most influential contemporary achievements with regard to the shaping of social perceptions was his refashioning of the child and of childhood both as objects of literary representation and as social categories.

Dickens's transformation of the Victorian child was a multi-faceted project, an aggregate of many influences and forces. As a literary endeavour, it involved his assimilation of a previous tradition of literary representations of children and his reformulation of that tradition according to his own prodigious literary imagination. As a project reflective of social reality, the Dickensian child may be traced to Dickens's formative experiences as a twelve year-old in the Warren's Blacking warehouse, but also to contemporary concern for the provision of social welfare, a current within Victorian society that Dickens both responded to and prompted with his writing. And finally, as an innovation of lasting social and literary influence, the pervasiveness of his re-imagining of the child rests on its appeal to the emotional and aesthetic needs of successive generations of readers. Paul Dombey, Little Nell, Oliver Twist and a host of other children are compelling figures because of what their separate stories seem to represent about children as literary constructs but also as autonomous individuals uniquely social due to their defining need for care and protection. Critical interest in the Dickensian representation of children is sustained by the centrality of Dickens's presentation of childhood within his vast oeuvre and the power of that representation to shape both literary convention and social attitude. It is as a contribution to the ongoing critical response to the Dickensian figure of the child that the present discussion is offered. In the following, I will explore but one example of Dickens's expansive treatment of children and childhood through an examination of the imposition of child identity in *Oliver Twist*. In particular, I

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wish to focus on the peculiarities and dangers of childhood identity depicted in the novel. In doing so, I intend to provide oblique commentary on the difficulties and mysteries inherent in the literary representation of children and to demonstrate, with the example of little Oliver, the mortal dangers awaiting the figure of the child in literary depiction. I will suggest that for reasons due to the compulsions of the novel's plot, but also having to do with the existential condition of the child, Oliver is continually shadowed by death. In *Oliver Twist*, the parish boy's progress through the social stations of his life brings him ever closer to death. Moreover, in conclusion I will propose that at the end of the novel Oliver does die a death of sorts – albeit in surrogate form – and that this death marks the beginning of a paradigmatic transformation in the literary representation of the child. Little Oliver is not Dickens's most representative child, nor is *Oliver Twist* Dickens's most representative novel of childhood. But with Oliver Twist and the eponymous novel, Dickens began the career-long process of reconfiguring the literary child, transforming the child from a Romantic figure representative of the idealised potential of the transcendent self to one marked by social and historical contingency.

"On ne connait point de l'enfance,"[1] Rousseau famously stated in the preface to *Émile ou de l'éducation*, his influential treatise on education. Childhood is a mystery, a stage of life experienced by everyone and yet unknown to all who have passed through and out of it into adulthood. Childhood, for adults, is no less a foreign country than the past. The essential mystery of childhood is only heightened by the very presence of children who are living embodiments of a once shared experience but who are frustratingly unable to communicate knowledge of their present state of consciousness. Coleridge gave voice to this fundamental enigma in a comment from the *Biographia Literaria* which expresses regret concerning the treasures of childhood consciousness lost to 'some unknown gulf into some unknown abyss':

> Children […] give us no […] information of themselves; and at what time were we dipped in the Lethe, which has produced such utter oblivion of a state so godlike? There are many of us that still possess some remembrances, more or less distinct, respecting themselves at six years old; pity that the worthless straws only should float, while treasures, compared with which all the mines of Golconda and Mexico were but straws, should be absorbed by some unknown gulf into some unknown abyss.[2]

Given the enigmatic presence and absence of childhood in the consciousness of adults as something both empirically experienced but forever ineffable, childhood is a compelling object of speculation by way of literary representation. The

1 Rousseau, Jean Jacques (1966), *Émile ou de l'éducation*, Paris: Flammarion, p. 32.

2 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1973), *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions,* vol. 2, ed. J. Shawcross, 2 vols., London: Oxford UP, p. 112.

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consciousness of a child and a child's subjective experience of the world, although present, are resistant to mimetic representation; they must always be constituted in an act of imaginative projection. As real as children are, they are also always a cultural invention.

For children and childhood to become the objects of focussed literary representation, they must first exist in conceptual terms as something separate, as something set off as a distinguishable state or stage within life. Within the social realm, this is the argument famously made by Philippe Ariès in his book *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* where he argued that new conceptions of the child and of childhood made their appearance in the eighteenth century as a consequence of larger socio-historically determined changes to notions of the family. According to Ariès, previous to the eighteenth century, the child was present within social life and as the object of artistic representation although not as a being perceived to be living through a separate, special phase of existence.[3] There was no cultural awareness of a particular 'sentiment de l'enfance' with attendant conventions of care and involvement in their upbringing. Children could not be represented in a manner specific to them until a conceptual understanding of children had developed. In his study, Ariès was at pains to document the changes which mark this shift in understanding, not simply with reference to changing forms of artistic representation, but also in terms of such social developments as the release of children from the economic necessities of work for longer schooling, greater consideration for the specificities of the needs and abilities of children and closer integration of children into the emotional life of the family.[4] Enthusiastically adopted by many in the decades after its appearance, Ariès's argument has also been criticised for its perceived imposition of too abrupt a transition between the modern and pre-modern conceptions of the family and the child. Subsequent scholars have significantly complicated his original thesis by emphasising a greater degree of continuity in what is understood as a set of interrelated concepts in an ongoing process of transformation and social reconstruction.[5]

But whether or not one agrees with Ariès's reading of the socio-historical record that the modern period introduced a *qualitatively* different understanding of the child, a *quantitative* increase in literary depictions of children

3 Ariès, Philippe (1960), 'Conclusion: les deux sentiments de l'enfance,'*L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris: Plon, pp. 177 – 86.

4 Grylls, David (1978), *Guardians and Angels: Parents and Children in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 16.

5 Cf. Ozment, Steven (2001), *Ancestors: The Loving Family in Old Europe*, Cambridge: Harvard UP and Pollock, Linda A. (2001), 'Parent-Child Relations' *The History of the European Family*, ed. David I. Kertzer / Marzio Barbagli, New Haven: Yale UP, vol. 1, *Family Life in Early Modern Times: 1500 – 1789*, pp. 191 – 220.

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seems discernible beginning with the latter decades of the eighteenth century. If not in itself evidence of change to a prior understanding of the child, this literary interest does suggest that the figure of the child as a cultural category was experiencing a period of intensified reconstruction. Over 50 years ago (and several years prior to the publication Ariès's research), Peter Coveney launched the 'Introduction' of his book *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature* with a statement of purported fact:

> Until the last decades of the eighteenth century the child did not exist as an important and continuous theme in English literature. Childhood as a major theme came with the generation of Blake and Wordsworth. […] the fact remains that within the course of a few decades the child emerges from comparative unimportance to become the focus of an increasingly significant portion of our literature. The appearance of the child was indeed simultaneous with the changes in sensibility and thought which came with the end of the eighteenth century.[6]

Coveney goes on in *Poor Monkey* to provide a selective but nonetheless detailed account of the transformations in the representation of the child beginning with Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge and concluding with the modernists Joyce, Woolf and Lawrence.

In this account, Coveney accords particular attention to Dickens, who is credited not simply with continuing the development of changed sensibility but with affecting a fundamental shift in the mode of representation of the theme of childhood from the lyric strains of poetry to the prose of the novel form. In Coveney's reading, it was above all Dickens who gave primary impetus to a transferral in literary energy from poetry to the novel, the preeminent genre of psychological and sociological analysis. Furthermore, in making childhood such a central concern within his entire oeuvre, Dickens, more than any other author of the period, ensured that the topic received broad social and literary exposure: "There is perhaps no other major English novelist whose achievement was so closely regulated by a feeling for childhood" (p. 71).

Dickens's abiding interest in the child and childhood as objects of literary representation is quickly, if superficially, enumerated. From *Sketches by Boz* to

6 Coveney, Peter (1957), *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature*, London: Rockcliff, p. ix. Coveney's confidence in suggesting an originary date for the modern emergence of the theme of the child has been criticised by Judith Plotz. Plotz, Judith (2001), *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, Houndmills: Palgrave, p. 254. Yet – and as a response similar to the more pertinent criticism of Ariès – the demand for greater nuance in the establishment of historical beginnings does not diminish the relevance of the essential observation that the eighteenth century witnessed a transformation in the understanding of the child and that this changed understanding was reflected in the literature of the period. Informative studies such as Plotz's *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* and Rowland's (2012) *Romanticism and Childhood: The Infantilisation of British Literary Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, to name but two, are themselves responses to this same transformation.

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Our Mutual Friend, Dickens created a fictional universe populated by young people and, in particular, numerous children. Indeed, children served as the central protagonists in many of his central works – *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Dombey and Son*, *Bleak House* and others. Dickens is credited with writing the first novel in the English language – *Oliver Twist* – to feature the life of a child as the central organising component of its plot. Dickens's lineage within a previous tradition of literary depictions of children has been established – from the allusions to *Tom Jones*, *Roderick Random* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* in prose to, amongst others, Blake's 'The Chimney Sweeper' and Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' and 'We Are Seven.' Dickens's fictional children did not emerge fully formed from the sea of his own imagination. But neither does his claim to innovation rest on the mere manipulations of a previously established tradition. Dickens's achievement was the far-reaching reformulation of the figure of the child in a manner analogous to that described by Judith Plotz in her *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood.* Dickens's children transformed the literary construct of the child and in so doing greatly influenced the related socio-cultural construct. Dickens central reconfiguration – a reconfiguration almost programmatically introduced in *Oliver Twist* – was to take the 'transcendent' eternal child of Romanticism and recontextualise it within a web of social and familial relations. In this, Dickens was writing against the Romantic convention of the ahistorical, idealised child defined by its very lack of social and historical contextualisation. Plotz has outlined the contours of a cultural construct shaped according to the exigencies of Romantic discourse:

> The Romantic discourse of the quintessential child is at once *honorific* and *decontextualizing*. It honors and glorifies a single being in terms of Nature and Autonomous Consciousness. As the emanation of Nature, the child is set against the limitations of culture; as the possessor of an autonomous consciousness, the child is set against the social sphere of dialectic exchange, compromise and modification. […] Both the equation with nature and the attribution of mental qualities serves to produce a solitary essential Romantic child, "single in the field," without social moorings. To identify childhood with nature means that children are conceived as existing free of the social net. Like flowers and breezes, like birds and stones, children exist outside of the context of cultural institutions—of schools, of the state, and especially of their families. (p. 24; emphasis in original)

To state that Dickens transformed the existing paradigm of the Romantic child is not to suggest that he abandoned it at a stroke. Remnants of the idealised 'natural' child remain in many of Dickens's most famous child depictions – from such 'old fashioned' children as Paul Dombey to the various dying children (e. g. 'little Dick' of *Oliver Twist*) whose pre-death 'intimations of immortality' render their inevitable deaths both pitiable and *unheimlich.* Many of the children in

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Dickens retain elements of their Romantic lineage; this preternatural quality is essential to their characterisation as human beings particularly worthy of pity and sentimental identification. Nonetheless, even though Dickens's most Romantic children clearly derive from a previous tradition of literary representation, they also possess individual characters which render them exceptional. Furthermore, they are all firmly embedded within shared social circumstances. Thus, as Laura Berry has noted in reference to Little Nell,[7] although Dickens's 'old fashioned' children may be idealised, the social conditions they endure are not. Indeed, it is the social nature of their predicament which renders it at once piteous and – in terms of the social criticism implicit within the depiction – outrageous. Like their Romantic predecessors, Dickens's child protagonists are presented as possessing an "autonomous consciousness;" upon this individuality rests their just claim to individual rights. As children, however, they are also necessarily social beings, vulnerable and uniquely dependent upon the care provided by their social environment. Laura C. Berry has described the dual nature of the literary representation of children as follows:

> Nineteenth-century children are often represented in the way that Blake saw them: as repositories for a culturally powerful and undeniable innocence, at the same time that they are subject to the experience, and restrictions, of the social world. […] the endangered child in the nineteenth century can be imagined as a liberal subject, a free and self-determined individual; and he or she can at the same time be understood as subject to the realm of the social.[8]

With the figure of Oliver, Dickens advances significantly the process of shifting the literary paradigm and social expectations regarding the depiction of the child. Oliver displays "undeniable innocence," yet he is also depicted as constrained by the social and existential necessity of proper relations with and within the social order. Still more dramatically, Oliver's vulnerability as a child is shown to reveal the capacity of the social order to inflict profound damage on the child.

Oliver Twist, or The Parish Boy's Progress is focussed squarely on the tribulations of a child, the young Oliver Twist, from the time of his orphan birth to his physical and social rescue in the establishment of his familial heritage at the age of twelve. The very fact that Oliver is a child, along with the absence of established parental identity, will bear both general and specific consequences for his and the novel's development. In general terms, the novel's plot will be propelled by the efforts to provide Oliver with an identity through clarification of his parental lineage. Thus, from its inception the novel can only terminate with the

7 Berry, Laura (1999), *The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel*, Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, p. 16.
8 Berry (1999), p. 4.

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establishment of Oliver's 'true' identity – a situation that will provoke the elaboration of several varyingly improbable plot developments. More specifically, however, the young parish boy's progress through life will be determined by the grim costs of being an orphan, of *not* having an identity anchored in familial relations, and the license this fact affords those in positions of power to impose one upon him. It is as a result of this search for, and the attempted imposition of, an identity that Oliver clashes with the various societal forces and institutions that provide the fodder for the social critique for which the novel is famous. The theme of child identity in the novel is played out in the nexus of stasis and change, in the interplay between the uncovery of his missing family identity – an identity which is 'authentic' or 'real' despite its absence – and the societal imposition of alternate inauthentic identities. These latter, inauthentic identities are not only wrong for Oliver but to varying degrees imply death. The more the novel progresses in plot development towards resolution of the mystery of Oliver's past, the greater the danger to Oliver's very existence. Paradoxically, as will be suggested later, in seeing the mystery of Oliver's past lifted and his existence and identity secured, the conclusion of the novel will nonetheless exact a child's death.

The essential trajectory of Oliver's development in the novel is hinted at in the subtitle of the novel – *The Parish Boy's Progress*.[9] Oliver is a kind of everyman making his progress through life guided not so much by Providence, as in Bunyan's working, but by the latent truth of his real identity which, under the compulsion of an unfolding plot, must emerge. Oliver is also a pilgrim of sorts just by being a child. Like the figure of the pilgrim-traveller, the child too is a universalising figure, a being unfixed in terms of social category who is able and, especially as an orphan, even at times compelled to transgress social boundaries to enter social realms that would be otherwise denied him. It is Oliver's unusual progression through the multiple stations of his surrounding society – each with an attendant identity forced upon him – that will offer Dickens the opportunity for, and the comprehensiveness of, his social commentary.

Despite Oliver's progress, his compulsory almost picaresque passage through experience, there is an element of his character and identity that is as immutable as the truth of his real familial identity. Oliver is, by nature, good. In his 'Introduction' to the 1841 edition of the novel, Dickens had claimed that he "wished to show, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse

9 Various critics have expanded on the particular nature of Oliver's "progress" within the novel. Miller, Hillis J. (1959), *Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels*, Cambridge: Harvard UP recounts Oliver's progression into successively tighter and more claustrophobic spaces while Sadrin, Anny (1994), *Parentage and Inheritance in the Novels of Charles Dickens*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, pp. 31 – 33 discusses the conflicting expectations Dickens evokes through his allusions to the literary convention of a hero's journey through life.

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circumstance, and triumphing at last."[10] The events of the novel more than confirm Dickens's literary intentions. Throughout the novel, the exceptional consistency of Oliver's character is dramatised in scene after scene depicting Oliver's subjugation to brutality and mistreatment. Regardless of the privations faced by Oliver, however, his character remains intact; Oliver's fundamental goodness is never in question. Even within the fictional universe of the novel, Oliver's resiliency is unusual and elicits disbelief. Ultimately, it is Fagin who most explicitly identifies the singularity of Oliver' character. A man practiced in the seduction and corruption of children into criminals, Fagin is originally confident that he could "instill into [Oliver's] soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it and change its hue for ever" (p. 152). Fagin – the inverted pedagogue – uses child's play, his own diverting stories and measured portions of kindness and violence as the "poison" with which to condition Oliver. But just as the far more brutal conditions of Oliver's childhood at the orphanage had thus far failed to alter his personality, so Fagin is stymied by Oliver's uncompromising goodness. When Monks complains that Fagin has been ineffective in transforming Oliver, Fagin responds: "it was not easy to train him to the business […] he was not like other boys in the same circumstances. […] I had no hold upon him to make him worse. […] his hand was not in; I had nothing to frighten him with; which we always must have in the beginning, or we labour in vain" (p. 214).

Numerous commentators have noted this statement as early evidence of Dickens's fundamentally Rousseauesque position with regard to his conception of the nature of the child. If one Victorian understanding of child morality deriving from Wesley and the Puritan revival saw children as innately sinful, Dickens seems to have aligned himself with the central alternate tradition, deriving from Rousseau, which saw innocence as the child's true nature.[11] Although the general thrust of Dickens's emphasis on the (negative) determining power of social institutions aligns with aspects of Rousseau's philosophy, it is unlikely that Rousseau is the first source of Oliver's ideal goodness. For with regard to his natural goodness of character, Oliver far exceeds Rousseau's treatment of the matter. In terms of goodness, Oliver – like little Dick – is a figure

10 Dickens, Charles (2003), *Oliver Twist, or a Parish Boy's Progress*, ed. Philip Horne, London: Penguin, p. 457.

11 In his *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, Walter Houghton suggested that "Rousseau and Wesley can be thought of as the immediate fountainheads of the two great streams of Victorian morality." Houghton, Walter (1957), *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830 – 1870*, New Haven: Yale UP, p. 267, an interpretation of the dualistic conception of the age which has been adapted by, among others, David Grylls to explain the Victorian understanding of childhood: "Victorian responses to children were the product of two quite different intellectual traditions. One was broadly the legacy of Rousseau; the other of John Wesley." Grylls (1978), p. 23.

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apart; his ability to withstand negative influence does not conform to the depiction of the formative power of social environment presented by the novel. This, although belief in the essential goodness of people *at birth* is a fundamental tenet of the novel; indeed it is an important component of Dickens's critical argument regarding the power of societal forces to debase character. In *Oliver Twist*, it is not the innate goodness of children that is questioned, but the possibility of such goodness surviving in a world of societal institutions that have been corrupted in the pursuit of, above all, material advantage. In this, Dickens accords well with Rousseau whose opening comments in *Émile ou de l'éducation* offer a template for Oliver's development as an orphan – *un homme abandonné* – subjected to the whim and prejudice of societal influence: "un homme abandonné dès sa naissance à lui-même parmi les autres serait le plus défiguré de tous. Les préjugés, l'autorité, la nécessité, l'exemple, toutes les institutions sociales, dans lesquelles nous nous trouvons submergés, étoufferaient en lui la nature, et ne mettraient pas rien à la place."[12]

As an example of the potentially pernicious effect of environment, Nancy better represents the dominant position of the novel with regard to 'goodness' and character than the exceptional Oliver. A young prostitute of seventeen, she could potentially have blossomed into the flower of Victorian womanhood – like her more fortunate pendant, the likewise seventeen year-old Rose – had she been raised in different circumstances: "The girl's life had been squandered in the streets, and the most noisome of the stews and dens of London, but there was something of the woman's *original nature* left in her still" (emphasis added, p. 332). In her interaction with Rose, Nancy directly references the causal force exercised by social environment in the development of her – and by implication every child's – character: "'Thank heaven upon your knees, dear lady,' cried the girl, 'that you had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood, and that you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and – and something worse than all – as I have been from my cradle'" (p. 334). Since his "cradle," Oliver's childhood had been similarly spent without the benefit of "friends to care for and keep" him, and yet he retained his innocence. Ultimately, then, Oliver's steadfast demonstration of "the principle of Good" (p. 457) is not consistent with Rousseau's philosophy with its emphasis on the formative power of the environment; indeed, it more likely derives from the literary conventions of Romance rather than the tenets of progressive Enlightenment thought.

Oliver Twist is the first novel in the English language based on the life of a child. The peculiar quality of Oliver's goodness seems to originate in the novel form's ancestry in Romance and its primary allegiance, even at the expense of verisimilitude, to the representation of ideals of morality and beauty. As a

12 Rousseau (1966), p. 35.

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product of Romance convention, Oliver's goodness – just like Monk's evilness – may be allied with his appearances. Oliver is exceptional to all who look at him. Even Mr. Grimwig, a man Wesleyan in his suspicions of the potential for natural goodness in children, feels compelled to acknowledge Oliver's seemingly innate superiority of character and appearance: "Now, the fact was, that, in the inmost recesses of his own heart, Mr. Grimwig was strongly disposed to admit that Oliver's appearance and manner were unusually prepossessing" (p. 112). Dickens's reformulation of the image of the child is depicted less through representation of Oliver's character as child – which is neither Rousseauesque nor Weslyan – than through his portrayal of the deleterious power of corrupted social institutions to endanger children both psychically and physically by their imposition of childhood identity.

While Oliver's essential character seems more indebted to Romance than Rousseau, there is sufficient depiction of the causal force of social surroundings to anticipate the preoccupations of the nascent realist novel. For although Oliver's character is more than Rousseauesque in its immutable goodness, his surrounding social environment is decidedly Wesleyan in its fallen state. Oliver's social world is hostile to him, its profound antipathy most clearly expressed by the willful misperception of his patent goodness and the infliction upon him of inauthentic identities. Because of his orphan condition – his near fatal dislodgement from the securing net of familial relations and the identity that status incurs – Oliver is repeatedly subjected to the impositions of individuals who are socially positioned to impress upon him identities of their own making. These identities are not derived from Oliver's *true* character as either an autonomous being or socially embedded individual, which is itself directly linked to his family pedigree, but from aberrant understandings of children in general and from the potential use-value to be derived from Oliver the orphan in particular. These imposed identities are more than merely vexing, they threaten Oliver with death. They are dramatised in the novel at three levels: through reference to clothing as the external sign of societal status, through the attempt to exploit Oliver for material gain and, most far reaching, the threatened accordance to Oliver of sanctioned categories of social identity.

As if in illustration of Oliver's essential helplessness before the randomness of this projection of social power, minutes after his birth, Oliver is wrapped in the calico robes of the workhouse. The assignation of a new identity begins with the baby Oliver's first coverings:

> And what an excellent example of the power of dress young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; – it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have fixed his station in society. But now he was enveloped in the old calico robes, that had grown yellow in the same service: he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his

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> place at once – a parish child – the orphan of a workhouse – the humble, half-starved drudge – to be cuffed and buffeted through the world, despised by all, and pitied by none. (5)

The forced adornment of clothes as the social markers of identity will remain a constant in Oliver's life. The "little brown-cloth parish cap" will announce his station in life as a workhouse orphan as surely as the Beadle's deprecating introductions. The undertaker Sowerberry will clothe Oliver as a "mute" to be displayed in his funeral processions and thereby both figuratively and literally deny him the voice that comes of an individuated identity. Rescued by Mr. Brownlow, Oliver is prepared to take on the identity of a young gentleman-to-be. His old clothes are sold and he is provided with new ones. Although the new clothes are welcomed, it is the release from the physical danger associated with his old clothes that brings Oliver the greatest comfort. Removal of the clothes seems to entail escape from the danger-laden identity they had conferred upon him: "he felt quite delighted to think that they [his old clothes] were safely gone, and that there was now no possible danger of his ever being able to wear them again. They were sad rags, to tell the truth; and Oliver had never had a new suit before" (p. 106). The difficulty of escaping social destitution and the power of clothing to both create and enforce social identity is later cruelly enforced upon Oliver, however. After his abduction and forced return to Fagin's lair, Fagin's charges mock-ceremonially strip Oliver of his gentlemen's attire and return to him the very clothes – and identity – he thought he had rid himself of while living with Mr. Brownlow. The forced adornment of "the identical old suit of clothes" and hence the identity of a street urchin has a physical effect on Oliver leaving him "sick and weary" (pp. 133 – 34). Later in the novel, upon reunification with the nurse who had lovingly cared for him at a previous stage, Mrs Bedwin, upon commenting upon Oliver's clothing and appearances, will be the first to identify Oliver's *true* social status: "'How well he looks, and *how like a gentleman's son* he is dressed again'" (p. 344, emphasis added). Of the children in the novel, it is not only Oliver whose identity is announced by his clothing. Noah Claypole, the marginally better positioned charity-boy wears the "leathers" – the short yellow trousers of his social station – for which he is taunted by other boys. The Artful Dodger as well, though still a boy by age, announces his cunning, knowing ways by the men's clothes he wears, the accoutrements which lend him "all the airs and manner of a man" (p. 60).

Clothes undoubtedly make the child, and with each new attire Oliver is presented to the world in a new social identity. The clothes given to Oliver, however, are only the external markers of his changing identities. The source of each identity prescribed to Oliver springs not from his nature, but from the subjective needs and perceptions of the social institutions and individuals who

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exercise power over him. The cruel calculus by which Oliver is perceived and identified according to his use-value is a second means of denying his authentic self and of illustrating the child's vulnerability to institutional and individual abuse. Like the changing of his clothes as signs of station, this process also begins in infancy. Chapter two of the novel begins with a blunt charge levelled by the narrator: "For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception – he was brought up by hand" (p. 6). In *Émile*, Rousseau placed enormous worth on the necessity of mothers breast-feeding their infants; for Rousseau, the moral order of the parent-child relationship, the bond between husband and wife, the family and ultimately all of society rested upon mothers nursing their children. Dickens does not articulate claims of this order, but he does seem to suggest that, deprived of the bonds of familial care – metonymically represented in maternal breast feeding – children are exposed to the bondage of institutional care. Here and throughout the novel, the exploitation of children is shown to arise out of their dependence upon those whose interest in children is based on calculations of financial gain. A life which should have been begun with the nurturing, non-materialist bonds of mother and child is perverted as the infant Oliver is "farmed" to a woman whose principal means of profiting from the care of children is to reduce their cost to her in food. The same debased calculation whereby children become the source of exploitation and profit continues at the workhouse where the provisioning of food allows the workhouse to reduce its costs; likewise, it is food that starkly illustrates the needs and privations of children. Food thus provides metaphoric representation of what Oliver is denied – physical and emotional sustenance.[13] Oliver hungers for both. When Oliver's expressed need for more food threatens to upset the economic balance of the workhouse, he is released into apprenticeship, an alternate institution of economic exploitation.

In *Oliver Twist*, children are exploited for their 'use' value and according to the 'profit' they bring to those – individuals and social institutions – holding power over them. This calculation of value is directly related to their defencelessness, which is in turn exemplified in the chief physical attribute of children, their diminutive size. Throughout *Oliver Twist*, Oliver's size, the physical feature which identifies him as both a child and vulnerable, is repeatedly linked to his abuse and exploitation in the name of financial gain. Mr. Gamfield, the chimney-sweep, sees in Oliver an apprentice small enough to perform the dangerous tasks of that trade. Mr. Sowerberry, as noted previously, is likewise attracted by Oliver's small stature and melancholy countenance, seeing in the boy the

13 In *The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel*, Laura Berry offers a suggestive interpretation of representations of hunger and food as manifestations of Victorian anxiety about changes in social rank, pp. 5 – 11.

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makings of a successful "mute." Fagin wishes to capitalise upon Oliver's innocent appearance, marrying it to the nimbleness that comes with his small size to produce a trained pick-pocket. Toby Crackit and Sikes require someone small enough to complete the robbery which almost leads to Oliver's death. In each instance, it is not Oliver's intrinsic human worth as a child that is valued, but the financial benefit that he can be made to produce as a *small* child.

As pernicious as this mercenary identification of Oliver's being with financial gain is, it is not as damaging as the numerous instances where a social identity is imposed upon Oliver by institutions and figures invested with official authority. When a Gamfield, Sowerberry, Fagin or Sikes take the measure of Oliver's child size and impose upon him their understanding of his use and value, this designation, as inauthentic as it is, remains localised at the level of individual perception. On the various occasions when Oliver is confronted with the power of authority figures to identify and characterise him within the public sphere, the consequences are potentially far graver. These people, due to the particular grammar of Victorian power relations, possess performative power when uttering their pronouncements about Oliver. The satirical figure of the Beadle sees in Oliver an irksome ward of the parish and treats him accordingly; thus, as Oliver knows, the Beadle's threat of a thrashing can and does produce a thrashing. More seriously, when a board member of the workhouse prophesises: "That boy will be hung" (p. 15) he is doing more than express a negative opinion of Oliver, he is assigning him a social identity as criminal that could well end on the gallows. The very act of so naming the boy has the power to potentially fulfill the prophecy. The process is still more explicit in the case of Judge Fang who, expecting to perceive a criminal, is positioned to pronounce one – "a hardened scoundrel" – thanks to his authority, as judge, to render judgments with or without regard for the facts at hand: "'What's your name, you hardened scoundrel?' thundered Mr Fang" (p. 83). Even Oliver's eventual benefactor Mr. Brownlow and his friend Mr. Grimwig are prepared to substitute their positive personal experience of Oliver for an identity which is grounded in pre-conceived conceptions of how a boy of his station is likely to behave and in reflexive respect for the opinion of officials such as the Beadle. Mildly contradicted by Mrs. Bedwin in his judgement of Oliver, Mr. Brownlow affirms his trust in the Beadle's account of the boy's life and debased character:

> "Mrs Bedwin," said Mr Brownlow when the housekeeper appeared, "that boy, Oliver, is an imposter."
> "It can't be, sire; it cannot be," said the old lady energetically.
> "I tell you he is," retorted the old gentleman sharply. "What do you mean by 'can't be'? We have just heard a full account of him from his birth; and he has been a thoroughpaced villain all his life" (p. 143).

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The only individuals who resist the imposition of a socially determined identity upon Oliver are women – such as Mrs. Bedwin – who by virtue of their gender are excluded from direct access to the authority of the official social order. Throughout his life, the few people to respond to Oliver with the feelings of care and solicitude appropriate to a child, rather than a desire to extract value or impose an identity, are women. Individual women show to Oliver a version of the maternal care that his mother's death deprived him of. In all other instances, Oliver is provided an identity which does not derive from personal experience of the boy as individual and child. Rather it is a reflection of the social position of the individuals interacting with Oliver, their perception of his social standing and their power to fix Oliver with an identity on the basis of their perceptions of children.

Each of these repeated instances of the imposition of a false identity on the child represents a real danger to Oliver which is dramatised in the text as both metaphoric and real. This dynamic is also presented from the very beginning of the novel and Oliver's life. Oliver very nearly died at birth before receiving a name, the first instance of misidentification in his life: "For a long time after he was ushered into this world of sorrow and trouble, by the parish surgeon, it remained a matter of considerable doubt whether the child would survive to bear any name at all" (p. 3). Throughout the novel, changes in Oliver's life situation – accompanied by the forced adoption of a new identity – are coupled with increasingly menacing images of death. Metaphorically, the danger is dramatised in the *ersatz* death of sleep. Oliver frequently swoons or collapses between the stations of his life to "die" out of one identity and social situation to awake to another. At another level, however, the transformations in his life are more literally associated with death, with each station representing a more earnest threat to his existence. As Oliver closes in upon the conclusion of the plot through the lifting of the mystery of his familial identity, death looms ever closer. Each stage of his life is associated with an identity and experiences more closely linked to death. At the baby farm and workhouse, Oliver is threatened with hunger and beatings; as an almost chimney-sweep, Oliver was very nearly forced into a life-threatening trade; as an undertaker's apprentice, he sleeps among coffins and accompanies the dead; in Fagin's lair, he is driven to near participation in a crime and the ending of his free life as a convict who "will be hung" (p. 15); and finally, compelled by Sikes and Crackit to participate in a burglary, Oliver is shot and left to perish. This last most cataclysmic experience brings Oliver to the very brink of death; further amplification, further progress along this dangerous trajectory is not possible for either Oliver or the plot. The catastrophe of the burglary does not lead to Oliver's death but to contact with his aunt. Rather than die, Oliver swoons to awaken beyond the threat of further danger to find himself on the brink of final clarification of his family heritage and

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identity. With the establishment of Oliver's parentage, the threats to his identity and life cease. Oliver survives the near fatal shooting to be returned to his prenatal status and identity. Re-established within a web of familial relations, Oliver is finally released from the perils of an institutionally imposed child identity.

The conclusion of *Oliver Twist* establishes the truth of Oliver's parentage and thereby returns the novel to the mysteries of origins and familial identity that had prompted its beginning. At both the outset and conclusion of the novel, Oliver's mother is present as a fateful absence. If, at the beginning of the novel, the death of Oliver's mother exposed him to the imposition of a child identity according to the whim and prejudice of a corrupting social order, the conclusion of the novel returns him to the embrace of his mother's familial world. Oliver's aunt will accord him the maternal care and protection appropriate to him as a child and ensure his future development within a system of familial, rather than institutional, relations. The return to Oliver's familial origins – and the novel's narrative beginnings – thus suggests a rebirth of sorts. Oliver is reborn into a class-based familial identity which the novel seems to suggest is as static, inviolable and "natural" as Oliver's unquestioned goodness. The conclusion of the novel also suggests a double death, however. Within the universe of the novel, Oliver dies the inevitable "death" of a child maturing into adolescence; within the ongoing tradition of literary representation of the child, the depiction of Oliver's fate suggests the death of the Romantic child. At the level of plot, *Oliver Twist* is propelled by the young hero's passage through stages of imposed, inauthentic identity until the uncovering of his parentage and the establishment of his true familial and social identity. When this passage is completed, the novel concludes. The resolution of the perilous questions of identity and parentage are terminated when Oliver reaches twelve, an age which presages the advent of adolescence and adulthood and, significantly, the change in consciousness which ends childhood. As the first child to receive extended representation in a novel of the English literary tradition, Oliver also signals the demise of the previous conception of the child known to Romantic poetry. Although coupled with conventions of literary representation associated with the Romantic child – his essential goodness – Oliver's identity as child is forcefully related to his placement within networks of familial and social relations. And even though the novel ultimately confirms the legitimacy of familial relations as the source of 'authentic' identity, the experiences lived by Oliver and other characters suggest the exceptional power of societal forces in shaping children and childhood.

It is the demise of 'little Dick,' Oliver's sole friend from the orphanage, that gives expression to the double death suggested by *Oliver Twist.* As a child much like Oliver in terms of character and of suffering, little Dick dies the physical death that the orphan Oliver was miraculously spared, but that the *child* Oliver

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must inevitably experience as he passed into adolescence. Both sickly and kind, little Dick had experienced 'intimations of immortality' and presaged his own death in dreams where he saw "heaven, and angels, and kind faces that I never see when I am awake" (p. 57). With his death in *Oliver Twist*, at the beginning of Dickens's career-long reshaping of the image of the child, he seems also to suggest the passing of the paradigm of the Romantic child. As one of many subsequent 'old-fashioned' children, little Dick was to have many siblings within Dickens's oeuvre. In terms of the sustained representation of the child, however, little Dick with his associations with the illuminated, other-worldly figure of the Romantic child is replaced by children like Oliver, subjects individually shaped – often victimised – by their social environment. In charting the social formation of child identity, Dickens's Oliver became the father of a new literary child.

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4. Dickens and Non-Fiction

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Maria Teresa Chialant (Salerno)

4.1 Physiognomy, Phrenology and Mesmerism: Dickens and the (pseudo)Scientific Discourse

1.

In the early and mid-Victorian period, literature and science were not considered as separate fields of knowledge as they came to be by the end of the 19th century and in the following one; scientists quoted well-known poets in their works, and writers explored the implications of scientific theories. Dickens, together with Harriet Martineau, Thomas De Quincey, Alfred Tennyson, Wilkie Collins and George Eliot, expressed a particular interest in the sciences of the mind, as they offered various forms of reading the hidden aspects of human beings. The main tenet of nineteenth-century mental physiology was the conviction that the mind and the body were interdependent, so that any understanding of the mind must be based on neuroanatomical and neurophysiological knowledge.[1] Physiognomy, phrenology and mesmerism, which marked the emergence of mental science in the late eighteenth century in Europe, were strongly interconnected to one another: the first two shared a common attempt to penetrate external appearances in order to unveil the inner self, while the latter focused on the hidden powers of the mind. Their circulation in England was quite significant, and it is not surprising that Dickens, who was attracted by any new scientific discovery or technological invention, showed a deep interest in the new pseudo-sciences – or sciences, according to their practitioners.

From the extant limited research on Dickens's reading, it appears that the range of texts he was familiar with was wide. Richard Lettis, in his books *The Dickens Aesthetic* (1989) and *Dickens on Literature* (1990), demonstrates the writer's knowledge of various disciplines within the area of the humanities – from literary theory to visual arts – and reports some Victorian writers' comments on his actual acquaintance with them. Not everybody thought Dickens

1 Otis, Laura ed. (2002), *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century. An Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 325.

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had "an intellectual life beyond the writing of his novels."[2] While Elizabeth Gaskell described his library at Devonshire Terrace (where Dickens lived between December 1839 and November 1851) as a place of "books all round, up to the ceiling, and down to the ground," containing "a goodly array of standard works,"[3] George Lewes – who had visited Dickens's previous residence at Doughty Street – was shocked to find that the library consisted of "nothing but three-volume novels and books of travel. All obviously the presentation copies from authors and publishers." He found Dickens capable of conversation on "graver subjects" than theatre and London life, but maintained that he remained "completely outside philosophy, science, and the higher literature."[4] Thomas Hill, who, in the late 1940s, undertook to trace the allusions to literature in Dickens's major works, writes, instead, that he read widely in geography and travel, and knew a number of books of a more or less scientific nature, concluding that he "really studied" medicine.[5]

The aim of my paper is, on the one hand, to explore Dickens's direct knowledge of physiognomy, phrenology and mesmerism, and find out to what extent he was familiar with related current literature; on the other hand, to identify the traces of their influence in his private life, and focus on the way he reused his reading in his own texts.

2.

Juliet McMaster, in her *Dickens the Designer*, maintains that the writer, "besides being a graphic delineator in words, is a physiognomist, a phrenologist, and an expert on clothing and gesture and all the outward and visible manifestations of moral and psychological essence."[6] In order to strengthen her point, she quotes two brief statements: one uttered by the Uncommercial Traveller in the eponymous text: "I hold phrenology, within certain limits, to be true;" the other by Mr Sampson, the narrator of 'Hunted Down': "There is nothing truer than physiognomy, taken in conjunction with manner."[7] But, apart from these fictive

2 Lettis, Richard (1989), *The Dickens Aesthetic*, New York: AMS, p. 2.

3 Gaskell, Elizabeth (1966), *Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, ed. J.A.V. Chapple / Arthur Pollard, Manchester: Manchester UP, p. 109.

4 Lewes, George H. (1981), 'Dickens in Relation to Criticism' *Fortnightly Review* XI (February 1872), pp. 141 – 54; *Dickens: Interviews and Recollections,* ed. Philip Collins, 2 vols., London: Macmillan, vol. 1, p. 26.

5 Hill, Thomas (1949), 'Books That Dickens Read' *The Dickensian* 45, p. 201.

6 McMaster, Juliet (1987), *Dickens the Designer*, London: Macmillan, p. xiii. See, in particular, the chapter 'The Value and Significance of Flesh' (entitled according to a line from Robert Browning's 'Fra Lippo Lippi'), pp. 3 – 72.

7 Ibid. p. 11, p. 18.

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figures' explicit declarations of faith in those disciplines, Dickens himself found confirmation in them, of his own intuitive faith in looks as a reliable guide to character, and of his conviction that there is a consonance between appearance and essence.

In judging the interior of man by his exterior, Dickens was, in fact, following the theories of the late eighteenth-century Swiss physiognomist Johan Kaspar Lavater, and of the German anatomist, physiologist and physician Franz Joseph Gall, the founder of phrenology early in the nineteenth century. Lavater's work was immensely popular in England: *Essays in Physiognomy* was published from the 1780s onwards (1789 – 98), and by 1810 there were more than twenty different versions available; it continued to be printed throughout the nineteenth century and had much appeal in the cities, and in one city in particular – London.[8] Gall's work was translated into English with the title *On the Functions of the Brain* in 1835 (Boston). Phrenology was first made known in England by Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, who had worked with Gall since 1800 as pupil and collaborator, and then by George Combe, who, although not a medical man, became the primary populariser of phrenological doctrine in Great Britain, publishing in 1829 *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects.*

Although there is no copy of Lavater listed in the catalogue of Dickens's library, he owed related works, such as Sir Charles Bell's *Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression and The Hand*,[9] and referred to another celebrated text in the field, Charles Le Brun's artist's guide, *A Method to Design the Passions*, in *Little Dorrit.*[10]

Throughout his fiction, Dickens "uses a language of appearance, developing an iconography of physique, gesture and appurtenance that he intends to convey meaning about character and emotion."[11] There are numerous examples, in his novels, of the centrality of the body and its language, as well as of the correspondence between beauty and goodness, ugliness and evil. From this point of view, straight villains like Fagin, Quilp and Uriah Heep are portrayed in a relatively simplistic way. It is the very extremity in the representation of evil through

8 Sharrona Pearl writes: "Physiognomy achieved almost universal penetration into the Victorian consciousness. […] it was disseminated through learned monographs, guidebooks, graphic prints, and training manuals and in a variety of entertainment experiences." Pearl, Sharrona (2010), *About Faces. Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge / MA: Harvard UP, p. 2. See also: Percival, Melissa and Graeme Tytler, eds., (2005), *Physiognomy in Profile. Lavater's Impact on European Culture,* Newark / DE: U of Delaware P, and Winter, Alison (1998), *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain,* Chicago / London: U of Chicago P, pp. 32 – 59.

9 Stonehouse, J.H. ed. (1935), *Catalogue of the Library of Charles Dickens from Gadshill*, London: Piccadilly Fountain, p. 11.

10 McMaster (1987), *Dickens the Designer*, p. 20.

11 Ibid. p. 10.

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ugliness that makes them memorable characters, especially thanks to a felicitous animal imagery which contributes to confirm the author's conviction that a monstrous mind always inhabits a monstrous body. But, while Fagin and Quilp are villains typical of the early novels, Tulkinghorn, in *Bleak House*, is the product of a more subtle study in the appearance of evil: "In this case Dickens builds up his effect by withholding his usual evidence; and so effectively prepares us for a muted but intense climax when at last Tulkinghorn does register some emotion. […] Dickens has managed to make his appearance the more telling for its reticence."[12]

Dickens's perception of the relationship between the exterior and the interior of an individual becomes more and more complex in his later work. In *Our Mutual Friend* – as Angelika Zirker argues – Dickens "uses physiognomy as an indirect way of portraying characters who observe others rather than as a direct means of portraying the characters observed. Moreover, the characters' success or failure in reading faces correctly raises questions about the effects of (mis) interpreting faces on reader response."[13] By drawing numerous examples from this novel, Zirker effectively demonstrates how "Dickens's suggestion in *Our Mutual Friend* that characters can, in principle, perceive and recognize the others' true self underneath the outer shell builds on the belief that there is a 'true' inner self to every person."[14]

In *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the increasing complexity of Dickens's perception of the relation of mind to body, and the contradictions between surface and depth become even more evident. Mr Grewgious's qualities, for instance, are not "discernible on the surface:" although he loves to define himself "a particularly Angular man, […] not having a morsel of fancy" – he has, in fact, an expressionless face and voice, as well as a difficulty in manifesting his feelings, and tries to behave in an arch and wooden way –, he is actually endowed with considerable delicacy, sensitivity and generosity.[15] Jasper, the villain of the story, is described in rather ambiguous terms: he is an attractive young man "with thick, lustrous, well-arranged black hair and whisker. […] His voice is deep and good, his face and figure are good, his manner is a little sombre." And yet, he is introduced as surrounded by darkness – a darkness which is both literal and metaphorical: "His room is a little sombre, and may have had its influence in forming his manner. It is mostly in shadow" (*MED*, p. 43).

12 Ibid. p. 9.

13 Zirker, Angelika (2011), 'Physiognomy and the Reading of Character in *Our Mutual Friend*' *Partial Answers* 9, p. 379.

14 Ibid. 383. Michael Hollington has written extensively on Dickens and physiognomy; for bibliographical details, see Works Cited at the end of the present essay.

15 Dickens, Charles (1980), *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, ed. A. Cox, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 109, p. 141.

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In establishing a connection between the exterior and the interior of an individual, Dickens was also relying on the theories and practice of John Elliotson. Professor of Medicine at the University College, London, the founder and president of the Phrenological Society in 1824, and the author of *Human Physiology* (1840), he was the most prominent supporter of mesmerism, which owes its origins to the work of the German physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734 – 1815) and his *Mémoire sur la découverte du magnétisme animal* (1779). Mesmerism spread quickly throughout Europe, but it did not have a major impact in England until the 1830s and 1840s, although, late in the eighteenth century, there had appeared satirical sketches in the British press, and an article – 'On Animal Magnetism' – was published in *The Lounger* (Edinburgh, 23 December 1786). Elliotson saw fruitful connections between phrenology and mesmerism in the opportunities they offered for exploring and developing the hidden powers of the mind: the new compound science was to be called Phrenomagnetism or Phrenomesmerism.[16] Elliotson's experiments with mesmeric therapy on his patients took place at the University College Hospital. In 1838, the mesmeric experiments were brought to an abrupt halt when virulent attacks on Elliotson's methods were published in the *Lancet* and he was forced to resign his teaching position as Professor of the Principles and Practices of Medicine. Other followers of mesmerism in England were the Rev Chauncy Hare Townshend (also a poet),[17] and James Braid,[18] who sought to separate hypnotism from animal magnetism.[19]

16 Kaplan, Fred (1975), *Dickens and Mesmerism: The Hidden Springs of Fiction*, Princeton UP.

17 Townshend was the author of *Facts in Mesmerism, with Reasons for a Dispassionate Inquiry into it* (1840). He attempted to separate mesmerism from science, or from a narrowly materialistic science.

18 Braid published *Neurypnology; or the Rationale of Nervous Sleep, Considered in Relation with Animal Magnetism* in 1843.

19 Hypnotism henceforth attracted medical attention, particularly on the Continent, where Charcot's use of it to treat hysteria at his clinic in Paris influenced the development of Freud's theories of psychoanalysis. Mesmerism started to be recognised by official medicine only after 1870. The physiologist William Carpenter, in his *Mesmerism, Spiritualism etc. Historically and Scientifically Considered* (1877), "set the claim of mesmerism in scientific perspective, giving a physical rationale for many of the phenomena claimed, without any reference to any special 'magnetic' or 'mesmeric' agency." Taylor, Jenny Bourne and Shuttleworth, Sally eds. (1998), *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830 – 1890*, Oxford: Clarendon P, pp. 3 – 7, p. 62.

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3.

Alison Winter argues that definitions of science were malleable in the nineteenth century, thereby rescuing the so-called pseudo-sciences from an "anachronistic and question-begging" historiography that places them at the fringes of society.[20] Mesmerism was, among them, the most popular one in England and the most influential on nineteenth-century literature and culture.[21] Elliotson's patients included some of the most eminent Englishmen of the day: members of Parliament and of the nobility, scientists, physicians, literary and artistic gentlemen of the town, as well as writers such as Dickens and Thackeray.[22]

Dickens was apparently very familiar with works on mesmerism. Fred Kaplan informs us that, when his library at Gad's Hill was auctioned after his death, at least fourteen volumes on 'the occult' were found, two of which were extensively annotated: Samuel Hibbert-Ware's *Sketches on the Philosophy of Apparitions* (1824), and R. Dale Owen's *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (1860).[23] Among the titles on the list, two books by John Elliotson stand out: the already mentioned *Human Physiology*, and *On Numerous Cases of Surgical Operations Without Pain in the Mesmeric State* (1843), the latter with a hand-inscribed dedication 'To Charles Dickens, from his sincere friend, John Elliotson.' Moreover, Dickens probably read Baron Dupotet de Sennevoy's *An Introduction to the Study of Animal Magnetism* (1838) – Charles Dupotet, a French exponent of the art of mesmerism, came to London in 1837 – and definitely read his friend Chauncy Hare Townshend's *Facts in Mesmerism*. In conclusion, it seems that between 1834 and 1845 Dickens became acquainted with a large number of books and articles on this discipline: "He was in close contact from its inception with the Victorian 'mesmeric mania' that dominated the headlines of the public consciousness for over twenty years."[24]

20 Winter, Alison (1998), *Mesmerised: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*, Chicago / London: U of Chicago P, p. 4.

21 Some of the literary works explicitly connected to it are: Elizabeth Inchbald's comedy *Animal Magnetism* (1789), P.B. Shelley's 'A Magnetic Lady to Her Patient' (1823), Robert Browning's 'Mesmerism' (1855), and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *A Strange Story* (1863). On this, see Corona, Daniela (1990), *Gli esclusi. Mutamenti letterari e cultura umanitaria nell'Ottocento inglese*, Palermo: ILA Palma, pp. 138 – 9 and ff.

22 Kaplan (1975), *Dickens and Mesmerism*, p. 54.

23 Ibid. p. 4.

24 Ibid. 5. In 1851, J.H. Bennett published *The Mesmeric Mania*, in which he tried to give a physiological explanation of the phenomenon (Taylor and Shuttleworth, *Embodied Selves*, p. 57). The issue that divided adherents of mesmerism was the question of its physical agency. Those who saw mesmerism as a matter of spiritual agencies and forces tended to focus on the dynamic relation between persons. Materialists tended to focus by contrast on mediating objects, many of which were held to be themselves magnetisable, or able to act as reservoirs of mesmeric force. Elliotson was inclined to the belief in a physical system of pseudo-

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And yet, Dickens's first reaction to the new pseudo-sciences of the day had been one of scepticism. His parody of them is effectively conveyed in 'Our Next-Door Neighbour,' one of his 'Seven Sketches from Our Parish' included in *Sketches by Boz* (1836). Starting from the assumption that "there is something in the physiognomy of street-door knockers" which allows one to establish a connection between them and the inhabitants of the houses whose front doors they adorn, the narrator declares that "between the man and his knocker, there will inevitably be a greater or less degree of resemblance and sympathy."[25] He first brings examples of these similarities based on a "new theory" which apparently descends from phrenology and animal magnetism:

> Some phrenologists affirm, that the agitation of a man's brain by different passions, produces corresponding developments in the form of his skull. Do not let us be understood as pushing our theory to the length of asserting, that any alteration in a man's disposition would produce a visible effect on the feature of his knocker. Our position merely is, that in such a case, the magnetism which must exist between a man and his knocker, would induce the man to remove, and seek some knocker more congenial to his altered feelings. If you ever find a man changing his habitation without any reasonable pretext, depend upon it, that, although he may not be aware of the fact himself, it is because he and his knocker are at variance. This is a new theory, but we venture to launch it, nevertheless, as being quite as ingenious and infallible as many thousand of the learned speculations which are daily broached for public good and private fortune-making (*SB*, p. 60).

Then, the narrator turns to consider the serious consequences which have followed the replacement of knockers with door bells: with the removal of the knocker from the door of the next house to the one he lived in, a "calamity" took place, and a series of bizarre lodgers succeeded to one another, till the final death of a boy. The situation is surreal and the whole story is ludicrous (in spite of the pathetic ending), its moral being that bells instead of knockers are dangerous; what is more interesting in the present context is the narrator's ironic mention of physiognomy, phrenology and animal magnetism, with the veiled indictment of charlatanism against those who practised them.[26]

But from the publication of *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens's attitude towards mesmerism began to change considerably. At least as early as January 1838, he

chemical affinities. Dickens's experience of mesmerism caused him to move between the transcendentalist and materialist explanations, between Elliotson and Townshend. See also: Connor, Steve (2010), 'All I Believed is True: Dickens under the Influence' *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century. Dickens and Science* North America, 2010. (Available at: http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk/ index.php/19/ article/ view/530).

25 Dickens, Charles (1995), *Sketches by Boz*, ed. Dennis Walder, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 58.

26 Brief mentions of phrenology can be found, years later, in *American Notes*, 'A Christmas Carol' and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (ch. 17).

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was persuaded to attend a demonstration of its therapeutic effects given by Elliotson at University College Hospital. These experiments – highly controversial as Elliotson made use of young female patients as subjects – interested Dickens deeply.[27] On May 10 and on June 2 1838, he most probably attended Elliotson's further demonstrations of the power of animal magnetism with Elizabeth O'Key – "the prima donna" of the "magnetic' stage" – and her sister Jane.[28] A bitter scandal was raised when, in the following August, at the house of Thomas Wakley, the editor of *The Lancet* (who had by now become a fierce opponent of mesmerism), a trial tricked the O'Key sisters into revealing their fakery. Dickens supported Elliotson through the scandal, became very close to him, and remained his friend thereafter.[29] His admiration for him grew more and more, and his enthusiasm found expression in letters and memoirs of the following years. On January 27 1842 he wrote:

> […] that I have closely watched Dr. Elliotson's experiments from the first –[that I have the utmost reliance in his honour, character and ability, and would trust my life in his hands at any time –] and that after what I have seen with my own eyes, and observed with my own senses, I should be untrue to myself if I shrunk for a moment from saying that I am a believer, and that I became so against all my preconceived opinions and impressions.[30]

This statement, which openly alludes to Dickens's previous convictions, is reiterated in another letter, where he insists in defining himself "a believer."[31] Speaking of faith, the Reverend Townshend was anxious that the writer subject himself to mesmeric experiment, but Dickens wrote in July 1841 that he "dare

27 Slater, Michael (2011), *Charles Dickens*, New Haven / London: Yale UP, p. 115.

28 Kaplan (1975), p. 36. An echo of Dickens's witnessing these experiments can be found in Dickens's description of Nicholas Nickleby as having "as much thought or consciousness of what he was doing, as if he had been in a magnetic slumber." Dickens, Charles (1982), *Nicholas Nickleby*, ed. Michael Slater, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 146. In the autumn of 1839, having finished this novel, Dickens sent Elliotson an inscribed copy of it with a note requesting him "to accept [it] as a very feeble mark of my lasting esteem and admiration." Dickens, Charles (1965 – 2002), *The British Academy Pilgrim Edition: The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Madeline House et. al., 12 vols., Oxford: Clarendon P, vol. 1, p. 593.

29 The writer attended various mesmeric demonstrations at 37 Conduit Street, Elliotson's house, and through the latter he also met (on August 8 1840) Reverend Chauncy Hare Townshend.

30 Dickens, Charles (1938), *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Walter Dexter, 3 vols., London: Nonesuch, vol. I, p. 376.

31 "I should be untrue […] to myself if I should shrink for a moment from saying that I am a believer, and that I became so against all my preconceived opinions." Letter to Emile de La Rue, December 16 1844, quoted in Kaplan, Fred (1988), *Dickens. A Biography*, New York: William Morrow & Company, p. 182.

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not be mesmerized, lest it should damage me at all," though he did hold out the promise that a time *will* come.[32]

In the meantime, Dickens discovered that he himself had definite mesmeric powers. Between January 1839 and June 1844, he had his own experiences. During his first American journey, in Pittsburgh, at the end of March 1842, he magnetised his wife "into hysterics" within six minutes of making hand passes about her head, and then, to his alarm, "into the magnetic sleep."[33] He successfully repeated the experiment the next night: "Increasingly fascinated by his own powers, after his return to England he began regularly to mesmerise friends and members of his family, sometimes for their social amusement, sometimes to alleviate illness." Since these powers had a healing effect, especially on nervous and mental disorders of hysterical origin, Dickens made up his mind to offer his service to Mme de La Rue.[34]

Augusta de La Rue, the English wife of a Swiss banker resident in Genoa, suffered from an acute neurasthenic disorder which caused spectral illusions, convulsions, even catalepsy at times. During his stay in Italy, in late December 1844 and throughout January 1845, Dickens threw himself into an intensive course of hypnotic treatment of this attractive lady, whom he was "happy and ready" to visit at a moment's notice, at any hour, even at four in the morning, sometimes with her husband present, often not, going back and forth between the Palazzo Peschiere and the Palazzo Brignole Rosso like "an anxious Physician."[35] When Augusta de La Rue was put into mesmeric sleep, her convulsions stopped, and after a month's treatment she started to sleep again at night. While in trance, she spoke at length, freely associating, describing her dreams and anxieties, connecting her illness with a "Phantom" who often pursued her.[36] That Dickens was haunted by that "devilish figure" at least as much as Augusta clearly

32 Dickens (1965 – 2002), *The British Academy Pilgrim Edition: The Letters of Charles Dickens,* vol. 2, p. 342.

33 Slater (2011), *Charles Dickens*, p. 186.

34 Kaplan (1988), *Dickens. A Biography*, p. 183.

35 Ibid., p. 184. The treatment continued for several months, even after the Dickenses left Genoa in late January for Rome and Naples; Emile de La Rue sent detailed accounts of his wife's condition to Dickens, who urged them to join him and his wife in Rome, where he resumed a face-to-face treatment, provoking Catherine's jealousy. Although Dickens denied any erotic involvement, he was certainly excited by the success of his treatment of Mme de La Rue, who, by January 1845, could speak of her "mental *agony* […] as a thing past." Dickens, Charles (2012), *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Jenny Hartley, Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. 155 – 56.

36 On January 27, 1845, Dickens wonders whether "the phantom originates in shattered nerves and a system broken by Pain; or whether it is the representative of some great nerve or set of nerves on which the disease has preyed – and begins to loose its hold now, because the disease of those nerves is itself attacked by the inexplicable agency of the Magnetism. I think upon the whole, I incline to this last opinion." *The Selected Letters*, ed. Hartley, p. 156.

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emerges from the letter he sent to her husband on January 27 1845, in which (as in his whole correspondence with Emile de la Rue) he punctiliously reports the stages and results of the mesmeric cure.[37]

In the end, Dickens became truly obsessed with both Mme de la Rue's "Phantom" and mesmerism. Fred Kaplan remarks: "[Augusta] and her phantom were now [Dickens's] creations. […] Dickens needed his patient and mesmerism as much as his patient needed him."[38] A typical case of psychoanalytic transference seems to be the case, here.

4.

The only direct literary outcome of the Mme de La Rue-episode was (as Michael Slater suggests)[39] a tale of the uncanny set in Italy and called 'To Be Read at Dusk' (published in *The Keepsake* in 1851), where the relationship between a powerful male mesmerist and female subject is explicitly sexual in nature.[40] But, more interesting than the rather naive reference to mesmerism we find in this story is the way in which Dickens takes the subject into his creative consciousness, and moulds some of his characters' personalities by a series of images and metaphors.

According to Kaplan, "[m]esmerism provided Dickens not only with a rationale for the working of personality and mind […] but with a language and an

37 "That figure is so closely connected with the secret distresses of her very soul – and the impression made upon it is so entwined with her confidence and trust in me, and her knowledge of the power of the Magnetism – *that it must not make head again.* […] I shudder at the very thought of the precipice on which she has stood, when that Fancy has persecuted her. If you find her beset by it, induce her to be got to me by one means or other; for there the danger lies so deep, that she herself can hardly probe it, even now." Ibid.

38 Kaplan (1975), *Dickens and Mesmerism*, p. 85, p. 88.

39 Slater (2011), *Charles Dickens*, p. 233.

40 A young and beautiful married English lady is haunted by "a dream of a face […] The face of a dark, remarkable-looking man, in black, with black hair and a grey moustache – a handsome man, except for a reserved and secret air. […] Doing nothing in the dream but looking at her fixedly, out of darkness." When the lady actually meets a mysterious Italian gentleman, Signor Dellombra, whom her husband had invited to their house, she – frightened at his sight – gives a cry and faints, as he looks exactly like the man in her dream. She accepts to see him again as her husband, with the aim to cure her of her "fanciful terror," wants her "to resist her strange weakness" and overcome her obsession by facing it head on. But whenever she meets the strange gentleman, the young lady "would cast down her eyes and droop her head, before the Signor Dellombra, or would look at him with a terrified and fascinated glance, as if his presence had some evil influence or power upon her." In the end, she is subjugated by his magnetic gaze and elopes with him – clearly a victim of his mesmeric power! Dickens, Charles (1981), *Selected Short Fiction*, ed. Deborah A. Thomas, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 69, 73.

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imagery that could be dramatically utilized in fictional creation. It is a language of self-discovery."[41] Elsewhere, the critic describes mesmerism as "a source of imagery for the depiction of character and the dramatization of the relationships between people," and sees the mirror as an object which draws from mesmerism both in a literal and metaphorical sense. Not only were looking glasses and other reflective surfaces used in mesmeric experiments, but for Dickens "art is such a mirror on which the real can be condensed and intensified; the artist is like the mesmeric operator, staring into the mirror, seeing within it heightened truths and powers, and transmitting them to the subjects, his audience."[42] Moreover, the mirror is sometimes a tool for the revelation of self, as is the case, for instance, in *Bleak House,* with Esther's painful acknowledgment of her resemblance to Lady Dedlock, the acceptance of her (new) face after her illness, and, in the end, the awareness and construction of her still unstable identity as daughter and wife.

The mirror is obviously linked to the optic vision: the mesmeriser's gaze is, in fact, an instrument of power over the mesmerised subject. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is undoubtedly Dickens's novel where this comes out most clearly through the character of John Jasper, who uses his will and mesmeric energy for the control of Rosa Bud, by whom he is erotically obsessed. The first occasion on which Jasper seems to exercise his influence over her occurs while she is singing (chapter 7); he watches her lips so attentively – "carefully and softly hinting the key-note from time to time" (*MED*, p. 92) – that the girl breaks off her singing in terror. Rosa, in spite of her naiveté, fully realises the sexual meaning of Jasper's magnetic gaze, as she explains to Helen Landless:

> 'He has made a slave of me with his looks. He has forced me to understand him, without saying a word; and he has forced me to keep silence, without his uttering a threat. When I play, he never moves his eyes from my hands. When I sing, he never moves his eyes from my lips. […] I avoid his eyes, but he forces me to see them without looking at them.' (p. 95)

Jasper's power over the girl is well exhibited throughout chapter 19, with reiterated references to his magnetic gaze. The scene is set in the Nuns' House garden; when Rosa meets Jasper, "the old horrible feeling of being compelled by him, asserts its hold upon her" (p. 226). The girl, aware of "his looking at her with a gloating admiration" (p. 227), is not only afraid of him but is also seized by a sense of shame and affront, as if she were tainted by his insulting attitude towards her. Rosa tries to subtract herself from his influence, but "her flight is arrested by the horror as she looks at him. […] She would have gone once more

41 Kaplan (1975), *Dickens and Mesmerism*, pp. 112 – 3.
42 Ibid., pp. 138, 113.

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[…] and once more his face, darkly threatening what would follow if she went, has stopped her" (p. 228). On this occasion, as he stands leaning against the sundial and confesses his "mad love" (p. 229) to her, Rosa's reaction to Jasper is similar to the condition of a person under hypnosis; she cannot move, and stands still against her own will: "A film comes over the eyes she raises for an instant, as though he had turned her faint" (p. 229). The narrative voice insists, towards the end of the chapter, that Rosa is literally magnetised by Jasper, not only when she is actually under his gaze – "The frightful vehemence of the man, now reaching its full height, so additionally terrifies her as to break the spell that has held her to the spot" (p. 231) –, but even in his absence. The term "spell" is, in fact, repeated when, on Jasper's leave-taking, Rosa's condition is described by a locution which Freud would introduce a few decades later: the attraction of repulsion: "The fascination of repulsion had been upon her so long, and now culminated so darkly, that she felt as if he had power to bind her by a spell" (p. 234).

5.

To conclude, Dickens's knowledge and practice of mesmerism were important both in his private and professional life; they belonged to a period in which the scientific understanding of the phenomena by experimental investigators began to diffuse into popular forms. As Steve Connor writes, "Elliotson's exhibitions of the O'Key sisters instantiated and inaugurated a tension between knowledge and understanding on the one hand, and embodiment, enactment and performance on the other that would run through the 1840s (and be repeated decades later in Charcot's exhibitions of hysteria in the Salpêtrière)."[43] Dickens's experiments with mesmerism did not only concern the treatment of his wife or of Mme de La Rue, which he reported as extraordinary.[44] They manifested themselves also –

43 Connor, Steven (2010), 'All I Believed is True: Dickens under the Influence' *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, North America, 2010, p.4, www.19bbk.ac/index.php/19/article/view/530

44 Dickens's power as a mesmeriser – even beyond his own will – manifested itself on a particular occasion, while the writer was travelling with his wife around Italy, after they had left Genoa on 19 January 1845. Convinced of his capacity to exert his mesmeric influence at a distance, Dickens arranged with Madam de La Rue that they would each concentrate on establishing contact with one another for an hour at 11 o'clock every day. The writer reported an extraordinary incident in a letter to Emile De La Rue of 27 January (already quoted). While he was travelling in the box of a carriage – engaging himself in mesmerising his patient far away –, his wife (who was sitting on the top of the carriage) got mesmerised: "And *can* you believe me when I tell you that looking at her I found her as I live! in the Mesmeric trance, with her eyelids quivering in a convulsive manner peculiar to some people in that state – her

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and more interestingly – in the form of public displays, with his public readings, which were real performances, demonstrating how much "under the influence" of mesmerism he himself was:

> Here, Dickens seems to be providing a kind of immediate bodily warrant of the kind of *rapport* that he sensed and desired with the large, anonymous mass of his readers. Mesmeric power both incorporates and dominates this mass, the readings being both literal actings out of immediate contact between the writer and his audience and a sort of projection or production of a scene of powerful fantasy. In the readings above all, the asymmetrical logic whereby life, will and power subdue and dominate a subject by mesmeric means is cut across by a logic of shared or distributed compulsion, in which performer and audience are both taken up. In the readings, the centred and oriented disposition of speaker and listener is only one state or actualisation of an entire, yet never quite completed mesmerism *combinatoire.*[45]

Since mesmerism is a matter of power, it is evident that Dickens was more or less aware of exercising it over his audience when reading the most dramatic and pathetic passages from such novels as *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop.* On such occasions, both reader and spectators became part of the same performance, actors on the same stage.

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hands and feet suddenly cold – her sense numbed – and that on my rousing her, with some difficulty, and asking her what was the matter, she said she had been magnetized? She was so discomposed that it was necessary to put her into the carriage immediately; and she had a bad fit of trembling until the influence wore off" (*The Selected Letters,* ed. Hartley, p. 155). Steve Connor comments: "In one sense, we may be asked to believe that the force of will being exercised by Dickens was so abundant that it could spill over incontinently into its vicinity. But this is also a will beyond will, a will no longer in command of itself, which can have effects that exceed, or fall short of, its own reach" (Connor, 2010, p. 15).

45 Ibid. 5. On Dickens's public readings see: Andrews, Malcolm (2006), *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Readings*. Oxford / New York: Oxford UP.

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4.2 "Animal Spirits: How Human Psychology Drives the Economy": Dickens as Reader of Victorian Economic Theory?

This paper will show that Dickens's novels contain valuable lessons in economics. Recently, in the wake of a succession of financial scandals and of the latest economic crisis, prominent economists like George Akerlof, Robert Shiller or Daniel Cohen have been particularly concerned with irrational decisions as well as with corruption and antisocial behaviour. What they describe strangely resembles a number of cases depicted by Dickens in his novels. Suffice it to think of the crooked economic reasoning of unforgettable Dickensian characters like Mr Micawber in *David Copperfield*, as an example of irrational decision-making, or of the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company in *Martin Chuzzlewit* or the Merdle scandal in *Little Dorrit*, as cases of corruption and antisocial behaviour. Dickens had already understood that human psychology could alter the iron laws of economics and he aptly described how it did so. Considering that today's economists seem to be just discovering the impact of psychology on economics should Dickens be considered as a seer who foresaw what future economic theory would look like, or was he inspired by Victorian economic theories on human psychology and, if so, by which ones and how? To answer these questions, this article will first study the novelist as a possible reader of Victorian economic theory before showing that his writing can provide a state-of-the-art reader in recent behavioural economics.

1. Dickens, Psychology and Victorian Economics

Regarding the question as to whether Dickens was inspired by theories of his time, one discovers that his writing may mirror an interesting development in the history of economics. Indeed, in spite of appearances to the contrary, the role of psychology in economics has not been discovered by today's leading economists, it has only been rediscovered. In fact, the interest in connections between psychology and economics can be traced back, according to Margaret Schabas, to the nineteenth century and, what is even more interesting, to the

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Victorian period and its economic theories. Victorian economics and their emphasis on psychology are also to be distinguished, according to Schabas, from theories developing in other countries at the same time, and which did not lay quite as much stress on the impact of thought processes on economic trends and behaviours. In other words, Mr Micawber, Tigg Montague or Mr Merdle were created at a time when psychology as a discipline was becoming a key source of inspiration for Victorian economists.[1] Could this have influenced Dickens's writing? Margaret Schabas points out that Victorian economists saw the economy as "mind-driven through and through."[2] To sustain her argument, she alludes to John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), to Richard Jennings's *Natural Elements of Political Economy* (1855) and to many other publications of the time which established links between political economy and psychology. The introduction of a psychological dimension into the study of economics was, according to Schabas, a way of dismissing the until then prevailing idea that this science was governed solely or primarily by natural laws, and that men had little impact and influence on economic phenomena.[3] Schabas adds that this "[f]leeting fancy for psychology" in Victorian economics was not to be found on the Continent. According to her, this British specificity was probably due to John Stuart Mill's influence on economic thinking and to his enthusiasm for the work of the psychologist Alexander Bain whose findings he contributed to promote.[4] Mill distinguished economics from the natural sciences and emphasised the impact of human actions, not merely instinctive but consciously devised, upon economic phenomena. Mill argued that economics were not just to be seen as the product of natural laws or as the result of human impulses, they were the result of individual choices conditioned by careful calculations of pleasure and pain.[5] The coincidence of Dickensian descriptions of psychologically striking economic behaviours with the rise in interest in links between psychology and economics during the Victorian period leads us to wonder whether Dickens's ideas stemmed from economic theories of his time, either directly or via simplified forms popularised by contemporary periodicals.

Considering Dickens's hostility to John Stuart Mill's utilitarian theories, harshly criticised in *Hard Times*, it seems at first sight unlikely that Mill's interest in economics and psychology could possibly have influenced the novelist. And yet, in a book devoted to the infusion of moral feelings into classical political economy, Claudia Klaver has shown how John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) tried, as Dickens in some of his novels, to reconcile the scien-

1 Schabas, Margaret (2005), *The Natural Origins of Economics*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, p. 74.
2 Ibid., p. 77.
3 Ibid., p. 84.
4 Ibid., p. 85.
5 Ibid., p. 77.

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tific, abstract and rational quality of political economy with more human and ethical elements.[6] Mill pointed out that economic phenomena did not inexorably result from the laws of nature and that they could be influenced by human agency. As a result, "political economists could warn, enjoin, rally, instruct, and generally pave the way for what [Mill] perceive[d] to be positive social and economic change."[7] In this respect, Dickens and Mill did share a common view that human intervention upon the economy was possible, but they diverged when it came to defining what this human agency should consist in and how it could achieve positive social and economic changes. Mill was on the whole in favour of *laissez-faire* policies whereas Dickens was extremely critical of the evil he thought they wrought.

One thing Dickens and Mill had in common in spite of their differences was their analysis of rent which they both saw not as the result of iron natural laws but as the product of institutional constraints which could be changed for the better. Mill developed his ideas on rent in chapter 16 of the second volume of his *Principles of Political Economy*, applying them to the rent collected by landowners. Dickens's conception of rents appears in his novel *Little Dorrit* where Mr Casby, a London landlord, masquerades as a benignant patriarch while using his clerk Mr Pancks to "squeeze" his dues out of the penniless tenants of Bleeding Heart Yard.[8] The landowners in Mill's example and Mr Casby in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* embody the institutions that needed to be reformed. John Stuart Mill defined rent collecting by landowners as a monopoly which had to be regulated so as not to become tyrannical. Mill even compares some landowners to Oriental despots.[9] Interestingly, tyranny is what Dickens seems to have had in mind in his portrayal of Mr Casby. He added an extra twist to the theory by expatiating on the hypocrisy of his landlord who strives to conceal his tyranny behind his benign appearance. Dickens thus does not just appear to have transposed the rent mechanism depicted by Mill in the country to the metropolis, he used it to explore the psychology of a slum landlord.

Besides Mill, Dickens seems to have read or at least been aware of other economic theories of his time since he attacked John Ramsay McCulloch's *Principles of Political Economy* in his letters and the Reverend Thomas Robert

6 Klaver, Claudia C. (2003), *A Moral Economics: Classical Political Economy, Interest and Cultural Authority in Nineteenth-Century England*, Columbus: Ohio State UP, p. 141.

7 Ibid.

8 Dickens, Charles (1963), *Little Dorrit*, ed. Harvey Peter Sucksmith, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 797.

9 For more details see, http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/mill/john_stuart/m645p/book2.16.html#book2.16

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Malthus's *Essay on Population* in his *Christmas Tales*.[10] He reproached them both with being obsessed with figures and averages and with forgetting the human realities lying behind these numbers. Dickens called for the infusion of human considerations into economic theory. Once again he strove to give economic phenomena human and psychological depth. Economic agents like the Hands in *Hard Times* are not just insignificant and anonymous cogs in Mr Bounderby's factory, they are human beings endowed with feelings and whose plight the reader follows through the novel. Dickens's psychology in *Hard Times* and in the previous example from *Little Dorrit* resembles the psychology referred to by Victorian economic theory in so far as it showed that men could influence the economy through decisions but also emotions.[11] Victorian economists believed that men could influence the physical world just as much and possibly even more than the physical world could affect them. Their insistence on psychology in economics was part and parcel of a redefinition of the economy as something that "could be understood and managed and not just left to the laws of nature."[12] Thus questions of production and prices, wealth and value, rents and wages were thought to involve psychological considerations as much as material factors.

Dickens differs however from Victorian economists in that the psychological considerations they alluded to were primarily pleasure and pain which gave rise to calculations, first in each individual and then in society taken as an aggregate of individuals, economic trends being seen as the addition of individual decisions.[13] Regarding such calculations of pleasure and pain, Dickens does depict, but not necessarily with Victorian economic theories in mind, a few characters like the lazy fat boy in the *Pickwick Papers* who might be seen as a parody of the *homo economicus* of Victorian economic theory, in that he is essentially governed by self-interest and calculations of what will procure him the greatest pleasure while involving minimal exertions.[14] Dickens showed how the aggregate of such behaviours could spread to the highest levels of the economy in his novel *Little Dorrit* where government employees have become expert in the art of doing nothing (*LD*, p. 104). Dickens here diverges from the teachings of Victorian economic theory in that instead of producing the greatest happiness for the greatest number, which is the outcome predicted by Victorian economists for such calculations of pleasure and pain, *Little Dorrit* depicts these calculations as a cause of general administrative idleness leading to national

10 Henderson, James P. (2000), 'Unless ….: What Can Social Economists Learn from Charles Dickens?' *Review of Social Economy* 8, pp. 141 – 51; p. 142.
11 Schabas (2005), pp. 76 – 80.
12 Ibid., p. 84.
13 Ibid., p. 81.
14 Dickens, Charles (1979), *The Pickwick Papers*, ed. Malcolm Andrews, London: J.M. Dent, p. 52.

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paralysis. Dickens also seems to have moved away from the economic theories of his time when he depicted entirely irrational behaviours. While Victorian economists strove to distinguish the *homo economicus* from the "creature of animal passions and instincts" of Enlightenment economists,[15] Dickens appears to have gone back to this Enlightenment model in describing irrational behaviours like Mr Micawber's compulsion to spend money although he knows and repeatedly states that debt will get him into trouble. Dickens also depicted such behaviours in organic terms, comparing their spreading to fire for instance (*LD*, p. 571). In so doing, he resorted to similes with natural phenomena which Victorian economist strove to move away from in their endeavours to isolate economics from the natural sciences.[16]

The previous observations demonstrate that in spite of striking psychological similarities, Dickens's work was only marginally inspired by Victorian economic theory and that it by no means adhered to it entirely. As a matter of fact, Dickens's perceptive accounts of some of his characters' economic behaviour are likely to have been influenced less by direct economic theory than by its spin-offs in leading periodicals of the time which examined the behaviour and psychology of protagonists involved in fraud cases or stock market bubbles and panics. Shareholders but also rogue businessmen or financiers and their victims were amply commented upon in articles but also in fiction often published in these very periodicals. As Tamara S. Wagner has pointed out, by the second half of the nineteenth-century, discourses on financial panics had become a prominent narrative structure in fiction and non-fictional accounts alike."[17] Newspaper accounts of the rise and fall of George Hudson, the 'Railway King' and of the rogue financier John Sadleir are known to have inspired Dickens with the shady, withdrawn and taciturn character of Mr Merdle in *Little Dorrit*. A quick survey of the Dickens Journals Online also shows that many articles in *Household Words* were devoted to speculation. One of them entitled 'The Penny Saved: A Blue-Book Catechism' deals with the state of mind of potential shareholders and distinguishes prudent from reckless types (*HW* 19 Oct 1850, pp. 82 – 83). Its very insistence upon this distinction draws attention to concerns about the blurring between "fair enterprise and extravagant speculation" which increased during the Victorian period and was pointed out by the critic David C.

15 Schabas (2005), p. 87.

16 In spite of this attempt to separate economics from natural sciences, Catherine Gallagher (2006) has shown in *The Body Economic. Life, Death and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel,* Princeton: Princeton UP that Victorian economic thought nonetheless resorted to organic metaphors.

17 Wagner, Tamara S. (2010), *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction: Plotting Money and the Novel Genre, 1815 – 1901*, Columbus / OH: Ohio State UP, p. 16.

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Itzkowitz in a 2002 article.[18] The article from *Household Words* examines different forms of partnership and the law regulating them. It stresses that inadequate laws have considerable side effects which lead to the confusion between investment and gambling:

> It perverts wholesome enterprise into a gambler's risk, and converts numerous undertakings into speculations which would otherwise be fit for prudent men to patronise, to an extent suited to their means. It filters out sensible people, and lets the reckless pass through into the management of valuable projects (p. 82)

In short, though in many instances Dickens seems to have drawn more or less directly from economic theories of his time, the patterns of economic behaviour of some of his characters and their psychology are completely at variance with the views put forward by these theories. In fact, these anomalous behaviours, albeit at odds with Victorian economic theories, strikingly anticipate theories developed today in behavioural economics. Dickens's novels provide readers with enlightening case studies that chime with modern economic theory, which leads us to consider his work as a possible reader in behavioural economics.

2. Dickens's Writing as a Reader in Modern Behavioural Economics[19]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, economics were reshaped by a new wave of economists who claimed that the *homo economicus* was an individual whose actions and decisions were rational and actuated merely by self-interest. This new definition gave rise to neo-classical economics[20] and to the theory of rational choice developed by Lionel Robbins in the twentieth century. Since the 1960s, economists have increasingly criticised these views and the conception of man they convey. It has been stressed that an economy cannot just be described in quantitative and purely logical terms. Important books published by Nobel Prize winners follow and theorise this new line of thought, in particular, a recent book by Robert J. Shiller whose title, *Irrational Exuberance* (2000), is drawn from remarks made by Alan Greenspan about "irrational exuberance," and which endeavours to explain market volatility. "Irrational exuberance" is a

18 Itzkowitz, David C. (2002), 'Fair Enterprise or Extravagant Speculation: Investment, Speculation and Gambling in Victorian England' *Victorian Studies* 45/1, p. 121 – 47.

19 I first explored this hypothesis in a panel discussion entitled 'Dickens on Broadway: Future Dickens, Digital Dickens, Global Dickens' organised by Edward Guiliano and later edited by him in *Dickens Studies Annual* 43, pp. 1 – 31.

20 Representatives of this school were Francis Edgeworth, William Stanley Jevons, Vilfredo Pareto and Léon Walras.

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rather unexpected expression to qualify a discipline usually thought to be extremely rational. And yet, economists are suddenly becoming interested in irrationality. Such ideas derive from John Maynard Keynes's concept of "Animal spirits" developed in his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936). "Animal spirits" is the expression that Keynes used to qualify transitions from blind faith to plummeting confidence, in other words mood swings that turn out to be essential economic indicators:

> Even apart from the instability due to speculation, there is the instability due to the characteristic of human nature that a large proportion of our positive activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than mathematical expectations, whether moral or hedonistic or economic – of a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction, and not as the outcome of a weighted average of quantitative benefits multiplied by quantitative probabilities.[21]

Behavioural finance has used this criticism of neoclassical economics to investigate and explain why market participants make systematic errors. It has highlighted inefficiencies such as under- or over-reactions to information which cause manias and crashes and it has studied the psychological causes of such market trends and reactions, namely limited investor attention, overconfidence, excessive optimism, and mimicry or herd behaviour. This is precisely what Dickens shows in the chapter of *Little Dorrit* entitled 'The Progress of an Epidemic.' The overreaction to the name of Merdle and the excessive confidence it inspires is compared to "a disease spreading with the malignity and rapidity of the 'plague' or as a 'vast fire.'" Rumours and word of mouth replace proper investor attention: "Nobody, as aforesaid, knew what he had done; but everybody knew him to be the greatest that had appeared" (*LD*, p. 571). Interestingly, when describing how blind faith in Mr Merdle spreads, Dickens uses the organic metaphors of an epidemic and of fire, thereby reconnecting economics and nature and somewhat undermining the efforts of Victorian political economists to distinguish the economy from natural processes:[22] "As a vast fire will fill the air to a great distance with its roar, so the sacred flame which the mighty Barnacles had fanned caused the air to resound more and more with the name of Merdle. It was deposited on every lip, and carried into every ear" (*LD*, p. 560). Overconfidence is expressed in the belief that "there never was, never had been, there never again should be such a man as Mr Merdle" (*LD*, p. 571). Dickens

21 Keynes, John Maynard (1973), *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (http://ebooks.adelaide. edu.au/k/keynes/john_maynard/k44 g/), chap. 12; § VII.

22 For further information about how Mill and early neoclassical economists redefined the economy as a separate sphere from the natural world to be studied as a social and no longer as a natural science see, Schabas (2005), *The Natural Origins of Economics*.

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analyses the very symptoms of this fever, in other words the way this overconfidence is merely based on unreasonable trust rather than knowledge:

> 'Very strange how these runs on an infatuation prevail,' said Arthur.
> 'An't it?' returned Pancks. After smoking for a minute or so, more drily than comported with his recent oiling, he added: 'Because you see these people don't understand the subject.'
> 'Not a bit,' assented Clennam.
> 'Not a bit,' cried Pancks. 'Know nothing of figures. Know nothing of money questions. Never made a calculation. Never worked it, sir!' (*LD*, p. 581)

Dickens depicts the way the fever to invest in the Merdle schemes spreads through Bleeding Heart Yard through mimicry and herd behaviour: the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard manage to draw Mr Baptist into the scheme, his behaviour in turn convinces Pancks who eventually induces Arthur Clennam to overcome his very strong reluctance and suspicions.

> 'They're right, you know. They don't mean to be, but they're right.'
> 'Right in sharing Cavalletto's inclination to speculate with Mr Merdle?'
> 'Per-fectly, sir,' said Pancks. 'I've gone into it. I've made the calculations. I've worked it. They're safe and genuine.'
> […]
> 'Do you mean, my good Pancks,' asked Clennam emphatically, 'that you would put that thousand pounds of yours, let us say, for instance, out at this kind of interest?'
> 'Certainly,' said Pancks. 'Already done it, sir.' (p. 582)

Besides irrationality, today's critics of the rational choice theory lament that economic models should be built around too narrow a definition of rationality in which the *homo economicus* is thought to be merely motivated by egoism. Thus, the economist Amartya Sen sees the rational choice model of the *homo economicus* as a "rational fool."[23] This is exactly what Dickens endeavours to demonstrate in *A Christmas Carol*, *Hard Times* or *Dombey and Son*, where self-interest and complete lack of commitment to others are the only feelings which motivate Scrooge, Mr Gradgrind, Mr M'Choakumchild, or even Mr Dombey for whom everything revolves around the firm of Dombey and Son and its unsentimental business until he realises the folly of having solely economic motivations. In the case of Scrooge, rational folly is indicted in a more oblique and satirical manner in that Scrooge himself professes to live in a "world of fools" where "idiots [go] about with Merry Christmas on [their] lips (*CC* p. 10). The criticism, of course, backfires and ironically comes to qualify Scrooge himself, which leads the reader to reinterpret Scrooge's definition of the word "nuts."

23 Sen, Amartya (1977), 'Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioural Foundations of Economic Theory' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6, pp. 317 – 44.

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Dickens seems to have anticipated the new meaning of the word nuts as "madness" rather than "pleasure."[24]

> Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, 'My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?' No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blind men's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, 'No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!'
> But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call 'nuts' to Scrooge. (*CC*, p. 8)

As for Mr Gradgrind and Mr M'Choakumchild, theirs is the folly of extreme rationality. Dickens confirmed these views when he wrote to Charles Knight "My satire is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else."[25] Mr Gradgrind is depicted shortly after this letter in *Hard Times* as an embodiment of bare rationality:

> THOMAS GRADGRIND, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir – peremptorily Thomas – Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. (*HT*, p. 3)

Through such portraits, Dickens anticipated Amartya Sen's claim that "the purely economic man is indeed close to being a social moron."[26] Sen defines this individual as being solely motivated by "egoism and utilitarianism,"[27] which is exactly what Dickens's characters above mentioned are. In the world of Scrooge and his kind, individuals are actuated by self-interest and society as a whole is seen as the aggregate of similar behaviours, the utilitarian assumption being that if people rationally pursue their own economic interests this will lead to a perfect and stable market. Theirs is a world of rational people motivated by purely economic interests. Dickens's stance is in keeping with Amartya Sen's later

24 "'crazy,' 1846, from earlier *be nutts upon* 'be very fond of' (1785), which is possibly from *nuts* (plural noun) 'any source of pleasure' (1610s), from 'nut.' Sense influenced probably by metaphoric application of *nut* to 'head' (1846, e. g. to *be off one's nut* "be insane," 1860). *Nuts* as a derisive retort is attested from 1931" From http://www. etymonline.com/index.php (accessed 20 November 2012).

25 30 December 1854, Henderson (2000), p. 142.

26 Sen (1977), p. 336.

27 Ibid., p. 335.

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position in so far as they both refute the assumption that "egoism and utilitarianism exhaust the possible alternative motivations [of men]."[28] They both reject this narrow rationality where human activity is based on the egoistic maximisation of utility and they contend that people may also have non-economic motivations and that they can even be irrational. In Dickens and Sen's view, all decisions are not, as Keynes put it "the outcome of a weighted average of quantitative benefits multiplied by quantitative probabilities."[29]

Departures from rationality are precisely what economists George Akerlof and Robert Shiller consider in a book entitled *Animal Spirits* (2009). They argue that until now economists have not sufficiently taken into consideration two essential elements: the first is that people have corrupt and anti-social behaviours which affect the economy and the second is that individuals behave sometimes in completely incoherent and illogical ways. Dickens's portrait of Tigg Montague who sets up the fraudulent Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company in *Martin Chuzzlewit* or his depiction of the forger Mr Merdle in *Little Dorrit* are striking illustrations of corrupt and antisocial behaviours, while Mr Micawber in *David Copperfield* offers a remarkable case of an incoherent line of action. Though he cannot manage his finances, he nonetheless tells David Copperfield, "[Young man,] Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery" (*DC*, p. 175). Such human factors and the psychological forces they involve nonetheless have an undeniable impact on the economy and can even, according to Akerlof and Shiller, endanger global wealth and market efficiency. In his description of corruption and bad faith, Dickens showed that he was aware of these sinister sides of the economy. He also showed an acute awareness that irrational behaviours can disrupt the supposed efficiency of the market and undermine the idea that its actors make only rational decisions. Mr Micawber belies standard economic assumptions that the *homo economicus* always shows perfect self-control and that because he cares about the future, he does not overspend his present income.[30] The irrational motivations underlying his behaviour can be found in a book entitled *The Prosperity of Greed* (2009) written by the economist Daniel Cohen who contends that at a given moment, people

28 Ibid.

29 Quoted in Akerlof, George and Shiller, Robert J. (2009), *Animal Spirits. How Human Psychology Drives the Economy and Why It Matters for Global Capitalism*, Princeton: Princeton UP, p. 3.

30 For further details regarding these mainstream economic assumptions, see Rabin, Matthew (2002), 'A Perspective on Psychology and Economics' Working Paper no. E02 – 313, Berkeley: U of California (http://www.escholarship. org/uc/item/2wr3z049).

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pathologically and collectively choose to ignore the reality principle.[31] This is precisely what Mr Micawber does. He is a pathological spendthrift just like Little Nell's grandfather who gambles compulsively in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In both cases, the pathology is not collective, unless one considers that Mr Micawber and Little Nell's grandfather embody widespread social types.

Besides compulsion, Cohen lists two other reasons for ignoring the reality principle, namely people's egos and wish fulfilment. This observation applies to Dickens's novel *Little Dorrit* where people let themselves be hoodwinked by Mr Merdle because it flatters their egos to be among the select few who get to invest in Merdle's grand projects. Mr Dorrit for one thing is proud to entrust his money to the great Mr Merdle. The inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard, who fit into what Cohen describes as "the most disadvantaged strata of the working class,"[32] invest their savings in Mr Merdle's schemes because his promises seem to make their dreams come true. They do so in droves, thereby illustrating the herd behaviour highlighted by Cohen:

> Mr Plornish, who had a small share in a small builder's business in the neighbourhood, said, trowel in hand, on the tops of scaffolds and on the tiles of houses, that people did tell him as Mr Merdle was the one, mind you, to put us all to rights in respects of that which all of us looked to, and to bring us all safe home as much as we needed, mind you, fur toe be brought. (*LD*, p. 571)

All of this eerily reminds us of the late 2000s' subprime mortgage crisis or of the Madoff affair and shows how modern Dickens still is and how perceptive his views on psychology in economics were.

Mr Plornish's fairy tale construction of Mr Merdle as a benefactor of the poor reveals another side of psychology in economics: storytelling. Many Dickensian characters like Mr Plornish or Mr Micawber make up narratives to account for their economic decisions. The case of Mr Micawber is somewhat paradoxical and all the more irrational in that his behaviour does not corroborate his emphatic and repeated warnings against the dangers of overspending. Because the human factor in the economy cannot be ignored and since "the human mind is built to think in terms of narratives, of sequences of events with an internal logic and dynamic that appears as a unified whole" storytelling becomes part and parcel of a better understanding of how the economy works. These Dickensian narratives, whether followed or not, show that Dickens was aware that stories are actually a real part of how the economy functions. This point has been reiterated recently by Akerlof and Shiller who have stressed that although, paradoxically, econo-

31 Cohen, Daniel (2012), *The Prosperity of Vice. A Worried View of Economics*, Cambridge / MA: The MIT P, p. 166.

32 See Cohen on 'Wall Street coming to the rescue of Harlem' and the subprime mortgages as a fairy tale which ends in a nightmare, p. 163.

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mists are expected to stick to quantitative facts to sound professional, in fact, storytelling is of paramount importance in economics and partakes of its very nature.[33] *Little Dorrit* illustrates Akerlof and Shiller's modelling of the spread of a story in terms of an epidemic, namely an epidemic of confidence followed by an epidemic of pessimism (*LD*, p.56), as the rumours of Merdle's success and later of his suicide propagate like viruses through Bleeding Heart Yard. Individual stories dovetail with stories of others and all these narratives aggregate into a national or international story, which becomes global and plays an important role in the economy.[34] *Little Dorrit* in this respect is the coming together of different subplots in which, as in the economic model described in *Animal Spirits*, the characters' "sense of reality, of who [they] are and what [they] are doing is narrowly intertwined with the story of their lives and of the lives of others."[35] The aggregate of such stories builds into an international story including commerce in China, debtors and creditors, and Grand Tour travellers. In an article entitled 'The Wiles of Insolvency,' Georges Letissier has shown that the interwoven strands that bring the characters together in *Little Dorrit's* plot are of a monetary nature.[36] One could add that psychological motivations and justifications are clearly part and parcel of these monetary plots. Similarly in *Our Mutual Friend*, the different layers of the story involving multiple representations and narratives about money, goods and trade combine into a national and even an international economy – if one considers the ramifications to the Cape – and this global economy revolves around dust.

Dickens's fiction thus gives us an important lesson about global economics in the Victorian period and today. It helps us understand and account for economic instability rather than illusory economic rationality. The subtitle of George Akerlof and Robert Shiller's book entitled *Animal Spirits* reads, 'How Human Psychology Drives the Economy, and Why It Matters for Global Capitalism.' Basically, this is what Dickens has been telling us all along. His novels may well be fiction but this fiction tells us more than many economic textbooks about how the economy really works "when people are really human, that is possessed of all-too-human animal spirits."[37]

33 Akerlof and Shiller (2009), p. 51, p. 4.
34 Ibid., p. 6.
35 Ibid.
36 Letissier, Georges (2010), 'The Wiles of Insolvency' *Dickens Quarterly* 27, pp. 257 – 72, p. 259.
37 Akerlof and Shiller, p. xxv.

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Francesca Orestano (Milan)

4.3 Against Reading: Dickens and the Visual Arts

The subject of the visual arts in relation to Charles Dickens has been extensively investigated. Leonée Ormond has written illuminating pages on Dickens and the Old Masters as well as on Dickens and contemporary artists,[1] with special reference not only to his Italian tour and the many instances in which Old Masters come into the frame of a book called *Pictures from Italy*, but also to works, new and old, paintings, etchings, sketches, which Dickens could admire, discuss and collect in London. Ormond's work is thus of paramount value in establishing Dickens's attitude to art: his verbal descriptions, criticism, and comments, whether casually set in letters or specifically offered as journalism or travelogue, are duly recorded within the frame of her investigation. My purpose, however, is different. I should like to focus, within the broad area of Dickens's verbal response to the visual arts, on those statements by him which suggest reticence or curt dismissals, or betray impatience, and even disgust, about those *mots d'ésprit* which short-circuit areas of visual perception not always in agreement with Victorian taste and the accepted standards of art tradition. I should also like to adopt as a critical starting point that fertile connection between visual arts and visual culture, reckoned together so as to justify at once art criticism and visual culture studies: in Dickens's time images live within a context in which high art competes with magic lantern slides, reproductions, photographs, dioramas, exhibitions.[2] The Victorian age fosters a proliferation of the visual, gradually emphasising not only the presence of the art object in its unique relation to art

1 Ormond, Leonée (1983), 'Dickens and Painting: The Old Masters' *Dickensian* 79, pp. 131 – 51; Ormond, Leonée (1984), 'Dickens and Painting: Contemporary Art' *Dickensian* 80, pp. 2 – 25; Ormond, Leonée (2009), 'Dickens and Italian Painting in *Pictures from Italy*' *Dickens and Italy: 'Little Dorrit' and 'Pictures from Italy,'* ed. Michael Hollington / Francesca Orestano, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 38 – 48; Ormond, Leonée (2012), 'Dickens and Contemporary Art' *Dickens and the Artists*, ed. Mark Bills, London / New Haven: Yale UP and Watts Gallery, pp. 35 – 68.

2 See Flint, Kate (2011), 'Visual Culture' *Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger / Holly Furneaux, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, pp. 148 – 157; also see Dickens, Charles (1996), *Pictures from Italy*, ed. Kate Flint, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

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history, style, attribution, fixed by the art historian. Insofar as technological reproduction destroys the aura of the unique masterpiece, the role of the viewer, of the observer, of the public, rises to importance, with his or her reaction to the image. Between these two poles, realism became a matter of "fears and fancies and opinions."[3] Even more radically, the response to the visual arts implies a test of the viewer's morality. Perhaps we have to go back to the times of Gerolamo Savonarola to find a similar concern for the response of the viewer.

Dickens's verbal readings of art (I shall especially, but not exclusively, take into consideration the Old Masters and other works seen in Italy) have a peculiar flavour: in them it is possible to detect something not just related to his role as tourist, museum visitor, and potential art critic, but impressions, shades and figures etched in his mind, which in turn generate innuendos, jokes and subjective responses which do not coincide with the canonical reception of the Italian art world. "[I] have no other means of judging of a picture than as I see it resembling and refining upon nature, and presenting graceful combinations of forms and colours."[4] With a few variations, this statement is often repeated in *Pictures from Italy*, and it usually fosters further comments which dwell on natural likeness, truth, sincerity, honesty: responses falling within an area where art history entirely ceases to impose its chronologies, its conventions, its lesson.

> I unreservedly confess, for myself, that I cannot leave my perception of what is natural and true, at a palace-door, in Italy or elsewhere […] I cannot forget that there are some expressions of face, natural to certain passions, and as unchangeable in their nature as the gait of a lion, or the flight of an eagle. I cannot dismiss from my certain knowledge, such commonplace facts as the ordinary proportion of men's arms, and legs, and heads; and when I meet with performances that do violence to these experiences and recollections, no matter where they may be, I cannot honestly admire them, and think it best to say so; in spite of high critical advice that we should sometimes feign an admiration, though we have it not. (*PfI*, p. 145)

These words have often been quoted as an example of Dickens's crude, "innocent-abroad" kind of relationship with art; of his lack of interest in high art matters; of his scathing, radical attitude towards old venerable things and classical elegance. In fact, they perhaps imply a closer relationship between artists, a confrontation and dialogue across centuries and huge differences in culture and style, in which their, and his, perceptions of reality are the terms of the question: even when their views do not agree. Art criticism stands in the background, the last foil against which to gauge one's impressions. And this

3 This remark from Dickens's 'Book of Memoranda' is quoted in Forster, John (1928), *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. J.W.H.T. Ley, London: Cecil Palmer, p. 751.

4 Dickens, Charles (1996), *Pictures from Italy*, p. 95. All subsequent quotations (*PfI*) are from this edition.

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relationship, consequently, for good or bad, entirely belongs to the present of Dickens's perception. No art history behind, nor the weight of tradition: just his own response to images, in an age in which images proliferated, with the sense that the screen between reality and representation was becoming narrow, evanescent, disquietingly questionable.

Somehow this is implied by G.K. Chesterton in his perceptive chapter on 'Dickens and Christmas,' when he remarks that "[his] are not travels in Italy, but in Dickens-land."[5] Even when exposed to the world masterpieces, Dickens is himself, "as English as any Podsnap or any Plornish." Closer to the point, Chesterton denies his need "to know that there was a Christian art exuberant in the thirteenth century:"[6] "[Dickens] would have been very much bored by Ruskin and Walter Pater if they had explained to him the strange sunset tints of Lippi and Boticelli,"[7] and concludes that "[a]mid the pictures of the Uffizi he starved for something beautiful, and fed his memory on London fog."[8] Granted, in Bologna he mentions "the academy of Fine Arts, where there are a host of interesting pictures, especially by "GUIDO, DOMENICHINO, and LUDOVICO CARACCI [sic.]" (*PfI*, p. 72); in Florence he reckons "Michael Angelo, Canova, Titian, Rembrandt, Raphael, Poets, Historians, Philosophers" (*PfI*, p. 186). But these lists of names sound like a way of shifting the responsibility of close accounts of art masterpieces. They are negotiations by way of excess, chains of illustrious names uncoiling along an oblique, allusive strategy, which refuses the emplotment of a narrative.[9]

Part of this attitude has to do with the man in his present day, proud of being not a "connoisseur." Another reason for Dickens's restraint in reading the visual arts can be ascribed to the inherited cultural suspicion aroused by Catholic religious paintings, branded as superstitious, and often expressing a frank pagan sexuality which made them appear twice as poisonous and disturbing. Last but not least, the issue of the Victorian reception of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque adds its complexity to the entire matter.

5 Chesterton, G.K. (1919), *Charles Dickens*, London: Methuen, pp. 118 – 19.
6 Ibid., p. 120.
7 Ibid., p. 124.
8 Ibid., p. 127.
9 Orestano, Francesca (2011), 'Charles Dickens and the Vertigo of the List: A Few Proposals' *Dickens Quarterly* 28, pp. 205 – 214.

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1. Reading Without the Spectacles of Cant

The 19th century increasingly thwarts the brilliant progress of the connoisseur, no longer a glamorous figure, although in more than one way connected with Italy and Italian art.[10] As early as in 1759 Sir Joshua Reynolds had described the connoisseur as somebody who has been to Italy, whose mouth is full of names and who is a social climber:

> To those who are resolved to be Criticks […] I would recommend to assume the character of Connoisseur, which may be purchased at a much cheaper rate than that of a Critick in poetry. The remembrance of a few names of Painters, with their general characters, and a few rules of the Academy, which they may pick up among the Painters, will go a great way towards making a very notable Connoisseur.
> With a Gentleman of this cast, I visited last week the Cartoons at Hampton-Court; he was just returned from Italy, a Connoisseur, of course, and of course his mouth full of nothing but the grace of Raffaelle, the Purity of Domenichino, the Learning of Poussin, the Air of Guido, the Greatness and Taste of the Caraccis, and the sublimity and grand Contorno of Michael Angelo; with all the rest of the cant of Criticism, which he emitted with that volubility which generally those orators have, who annex no ideas to their words.[11]

This assessment is endorsed by William Hazlitt, who evokes "an age when connoisseurship had not become a fashion," while in his days "the voice of the few whom nature intended for judges, is apt to be drowned in the noisy and forward suffrages of shallow smatterers in taste."[12]

> But does not every ignorant connoisseur […] talk with the same vapid assurance of Michael Angelo, though he has never seen even a copy of any of his pictures, as if he had studied them accurately, – merely because Sir Joshua Reynolds has praised him?[13]

In Hazlitt's words there was more than enough to suggest caution to those who travelled to Italy with the purpose of writing about the masterpieces of Italian art. Young Ruskin would rather dwell on modern painters and his favourite J.M.W. Turner; Murray's guides would provide travellers with a sketchy, handy, portable paper Cicerone – "the little-old man (or the Guide-Book) […] never tired of extolling the good [monuments]" (*PfI*, p. 70). Typically, Dickens betrays a human interest in the Cicerone, keener to tell the sad story of the little man than

10 Orestano, Francesca (2012), 'Ascesa e declino del connoisseur: l'élite del gusto, tra distinzione e ridicolo' *La formazione delle élites in Europa dal Rinascimento alla Restaurazione*, ed. A. Cagnolati, Rome: Aracne Editrice, pp. 205 – 24.

11 Reynolds, Joshua (1992), 'To *The Idler*, Sept. 29, 1759' *Discourses*, ed. Pat Rogers, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 348 – 49.

12 Hazlitt, William (1991), 'Whether the Fine Arts are Promoted by Academies' *Selected Writings*, ed. J. Cook, Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. 262 – 66

13 Hazlitt, William (1991) p. 265.

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to exploit the human catalogue of masterpieces, alias "the professional Cicerone always attached to the party" (*PfI*, p. 130). As for Sir Joshua, in Mantua the learned geese of the city have more to teach about paintings than the President of the Royal Academy: "What a gallery it was! I would take their opinion on a question of art, in preference to the discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds" (*PfI*, p. 92). Dickens's comments in front of several art works constantly reaffirm his distance from connoisseurship and its mannerisms. In Rome

> many most noble statues, and wonderful pictures, are there; nor is it heresy to say that there is a considerable amount of rubbish there, too. When any old piece of sculpture dug out of the ground, finds a place in a gallery because it is old, and without any reference to its intrinsic merits: and finds admirers by the hundred, because it is there, and for no other reason on earth: there will be no lack of objects, very indifferent in the plain eyesight of any one who employs so vulgar a property, when he may wear *the spectacles of Cant* for less than nothing, and *establish himself as a man of taste* for the mere trouble of putting them on. […] It seems to me, too, that the indiscriminate and determined raptures in which some critics indulge, is incompatible with the true appreciation of the really great and transcendent works. (*PfI*, pp. 144–45; my emphases)

Again, he observes how often "[c]onnoisseurs fall into raptures" (*PfI*, p. 67) or into "mild convulsions" (*PfI*, p. 95) in front of some art works: he is reading reactions, rather than images, and registering inordinate commotion, exaggeration, and a faked enthusiasm. His suspicious attitude against the connoisseur can be associated with Benjamin's and Gombrich's remarks about this figure.

In his essay on Edward Fuchs, Benjamin describes an age – Dickens's age as well – in which the art market, art itself indeed, becomes a commodity. Mass reproduction in the Victorian age allows people like Fuchs to collect prints, caricatures and erotica: "The fetish of the art market is the master's name. From a historical point of view, Fuchs's greatest achievement may be that he cleared the way for art history to be freed from the fetish of the master's signature."[14] In this age the connoisseur who associates art with the fetish of a name, and the potential profit of a valuable attribution, should be distinguished from the art historian, whose interests move towards art culture and increasingly to matters of style and form, and possibly from the collector, enjoying a private relationship with images not necessarily valuable.

We are aware, from the work of Ormond and Flint,[15] that Dickens was not a

14 Benjamin, Walter (2008), 'Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian' *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. M.W. Jennings et al., Cambridge / MA: The Belknap P, pp. 116–57. Also see Piggott, Gillian (2012), *Dickens and Benjamin. Moments of Revelation, Fragments of Modernity*, Farnham: Ashgate.

15 Flint, Kate (2011), pp. 383.

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collector, but that he would buy reproductions to decorate his house, prints, and photographs. He cared for portraits, of course, and for paintings inspired by his novels, or made by his friends, Augustus Egg, William Powell Frith, Daniel Maclise, Clarkson Stanfield. For Dickens the fetish of the artist's name does not seem to hold paramount importance, but in his house there is plenty of visual decoration. For the Victorians "ornament has become the metaphor of Art, and of Art as the symbol or visible token of wealth:"

> The Victorian interior with its aspidistras and tiger skins, its velvet curtains and 'ornaments' on the mantlepiece, its furniture covered with ornamental allusions to the art of all respected ages, is really shaped in the likeness of an aristocratic museum in which the spoils of centuries display the owner's 'connoisseurship.'[16]

Thus the connoisseur at home is different from the connoisseur in Italy: at home he can be associated with Fuchs, increasingly drawn towards images rather than high art. In Italy, with their raptures and convulsions, connoisseurs and art collectors are similar to those figures portrayed by Daumier in his caricatures of

> tall, thin figures whose eyes shot fiery glances […] descendants of those gold-diggers, necromancers, and misers which populate the paintings of the old masters. […] In satisfying the 'base' desire for possession, this collector carries out research on an art in whose creation the productive forces and the masses come together.[17]

For Gombrich this kind of connoisseur, Benjamin's necromancer and gold-digger, is one who "wants to identify himself with the artist; he must be drawn into the charmed circle and share in his secret."[18] He "repeats the artist's imaginative performance in his own mind."[19] In this way, the frank eroticism of Titian's *Europa* would be absorbed "in that aesthetic process of re-creation" that caused the painting to be accepted without feelings of guilt even by the pious King Philip II of Spain.

Thus Dickens's stern refusal to be associated with the gang of the fashionable connoisseurs can be explained in several ways. At home *objets d'art*, ornaments, souvenirs proliferate side by side with paintings and etchings, each with its personal relevance to the master of the house; next to these, the mass production of art replicas offers a profusion of images; finally the art market enhances the

16 Gombrich, E.H. (1978a), 'Visual Metaphors of Value in Art' *Meditations on a Hobby Horse, and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, ed. E.H. Gombrich, London / New York: Phaidon, pp. 12 – 29.

17 Benjamin,Walter (2008), p. 143.

18 Gombrich, E.H. (1978b), 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art' *Meditations on a Hobby Horse, and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, ed. E.H. Gombrich, London / New York, Phaidon, pp. 30 – 44, pp. 35 – 36.

19 Gombrich, E.H. (1978b), p. 37.

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fetish of the attribution, boosting old art under modern veneering, as Dickens makes ironically clear in a passage of *Little Dorrit:*

> There were views, like and unlike, of a multitude of places; and there was one little picture-room devoted to a few of the regular sticky old Saints, with sinews like whip-cord, hair like Neptune's, wrinkles like tattooing, and such coats of varnish that every holy personage served for a fly-trap, and became what is now called in the vulgar tongue a Catch-em-alive O. Of these pictorial acquisitions Mr Meagles spoke in the usual manner. He was no judge, he said, except of what pleased himself; he had picked them up, dirt-cheap, and people had considered them rather fine, who at any rate ought to know something of the subject, had declared that 'Sage, Reading' (a specially oily old gentleman in a blanket, with a swan's-down tippet for a beard, and a web of cracks all over him like rich pie-crust), to be a fine Guercino. As for Sebastian del Piombo there, you would judge for yourself; if it were not his later manner, the question was, Who was it? Titian, that might or might not be – perhaps he had only touched it. Daniel Doyce said perhaps he hadn't touched it, but Mr Meagles rather declined to overhear the remark.[20]

The Meagleses have also stuffed their house with souvenirs, "an infinite variety of lumber" which builds up a weighty list of the "threadbare grotesque type," as Orlando remarks, insofar as "the innocence of the private collection is no longer protected from industrial malice."[21] Dickens's refusal to wear the spectacles of cant indicates his clear-sighted notion of the Victorian drive of visual culture, its excess and illusory promise of distinction and value offered as a market commodity.

Another reason for distancing himself from connoisseurship has to do with that intimate sharing of the aesthetic process which leads to the core of the artist's intentions, but then exposes the writer to the dilemma of giving verbal articulation and legibility to images representing what Gombrich describes as "conventional taboos."[22]

2. Victorian Unreadables

Two passages illustrate this point: the first from Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, the second from Yukio Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask*. They help to illuminate ways of reading what mid-nineteenth century conventions would

20 Dickens, Charles (1987), *Little Dorrit*, ed. John Holloway, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 236 – 7.

21 Orlando, Francesco, ed. (2006), *Obsolete Objects in the Literary Imagination. Ruins, Relics, Rarities, Rubbish, Uninhabited Places and Hidden Treasures*, New Haven: Yale UP, p. 334.

22 Gombrich, E.H. (1978b), p. 37.

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deem unreadable, or hide behind the literary label, and veil, of a sanctimonious theme.

In Sicily, the prince's old sisters have built a private chapel in their palace, filling it with (fake) holy relics. A young and energetic Piedmontese Monsignore visits them, and scans the altar centrepiece image:

> It was a painting in the style of Cremona, and represented a slim and very attractive young woman with eyes turned to heaven and an abundance of brown hair scattered in gracious disorder on half-bare shoulders; in her right hand she was gripping a crumpled letter, with an expression of anxious expectancy not unconnected to a certain sparkle in her glistening eyes […] No Holy Child, no crowns, no snakes, no stars, none in fact of those symbols which usually accompany the image of Mary; […] Monsignor drew nearer, went up one of the altar steps and stood there, without crossing himself, looking at the picture for a minute or two, his face all smiling admiration as if he were an art critic. […]
> 'A fine painting that, very expressive.'
> 'A miraculous icon, Monsignor, most miraculous! … It represents the Madonna of the Letter.' […]
> [Later on, turning to the chaplain] Monsignor spoke. 'And so you, Father Titta, have actually said mass for years in front of the picture of that girl? That girl with a rendezvous and waiting for her lover? Now don't tell me you too believed it was a holy icon.'[23]

Tomasi highlights a trait which is almost a leitmotif in Dickens's response to art: namely his awareness of the gap between picture and word, between the truth of visual perception and the language used to encode what is seen, making it readable. The gap seemed especially unbridgeable when Italian religious art came into close focus, requiring not just the tame enumeration of a guide, or the exclamation marks used by Mariana Starke, but the kind of narrative legibility to which Victorians were used when Victorian paintings were exhibited:

> In England the Royal Academy was the great upholder of the tradition of a 'British School of Art,' derived from Hogarth, in which paintings delivered moral lessons of modern life encapsulated in perfectly legible narratives. This style was associated with painters like William Powell Frith and critics like Tom Taylor for *The Times*, who wrote dissecting Frith's *Derby Day* (1858) or *Railway Station* (1862) into a series of moralizing narrative episodes. These paintings were also associated with the upwardly mobile bourgeois viewers who patronized the Royal Academy […] the 'narrative' interpretation of art was popular, accessible to anyone who could follow a visual story. The public preferred spectacle, splash, story, and sentiment, all depicted in a realist manner, a populist kind of Ruskinian 'truth to nature' which could be discerned even by the most untrained eye.[24]

23 di Lampedusa, Giuseppe Tomasi (1988), *The Leopard*, London: Collins Harvill, pp. 197 – 99.
24 Teukolsky, Rachel (2002), 'The Politics of Formalist Art Criticism: Pater's 'School of Gior-

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Compared with the reassuringly readable morals in works painted by British artists (narratives clearly indicating virtue and guilt, sinful sin, and just punishment, as in the trilogy *Past and Present* (1858) by Augustus Egg, the friend with whom Dickens travels again to Italy in 1853), Italian paintings did not suggest the same certainties: pretty girls posing as madonnas, men invested with all possible roles, from saints to assassins and devils, holy faces and nude bodies oozing with pagan sex-appeal, created that kind of dilemma Dickens often had to face in *Pictures from Italy*. The solutions he finds are manifold, but fall into recurring discursive strategies. Such, as already remarked, are his comments against the cant of art criticism which amount to the rhetoric of the litotes, stressing his incapacity or unwillingness to read a painting; another pattern employs the strategy of the list where by sheer excess we are made aware of the multiplicity of readings available to one single image. Another pattern is offered by ridicule and laughter, creating a kind of ironic complicity about matters which writer and reader jointly and tacitly acknowledge. In such ways Dickens tries to handle the gap between the visual and its verbal representation, between the actual source and the finished work, the title and the subject of the painting, the nature of the model and the narrative he has to provide for the public.

> However, Dickens not only expects his readers to know how absurdly varied were the titles assigned to pictures by dealers and auctioneers, but also to know what he had surely noticed in Italian palaces, how similar old paintings of women might be portraits, historical figures or allegories, or more than one thing – a portrait of a woman, as Cleopatra, say, or as a saint or a virtue.[25]

The point gains evidence in *Dombey and Son*, when Mr Carker looks at a picture, perhaps a Juno, perhaps Potiphar's wife, perhaps a scornful Nymph: perhaps Edith.[26] These dissolving views already remind us of the manifold uncanny icons layered in Walter Pater's description of Mona Lisa. Fluctuating fantasies about multiple simultaneous identities dissolve into each other, but they can be also packed together into the awful concentration of one recurring nightmare. This occurs in *Pictures from Italy* in the passage about the models loitering on the steps of Piazza di Spagna, in Rome, waiting to be hired by artists; a feature which characteristically shortens the distance between Rome and London when

gione' *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake et al., Greensboro / University of North Carolina: ELT Press, pp. 151 – 69.

25 Penny, Nicholas (2012), 'Dickens and Philistinism' *Dickens and the Artists*, ed. Mark Bills, New Haven / London: Yale UP and Watts Gallery, pp. 11 – 34.

26 Dickens, Charles (1999), *Dombey and Son*, ed. Alan Horsman, Oxford: Oxford UP; on the multiplicity of Edith's face, likened to a Gorgon and a *femme fatale* see Lennartz, Norbert (2012), 'Dickens as a Modernist Romantic: The Case of Edith Dombey in *Dombey and Son*' *Dickens's Signs, Readers' Designs: New Bearings in Dickens Criticism*, ed. Francesca Orestano / Norbert Lennartz, Rome: Aracne Editrice, pp. 105 – 26.

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Dickens recognises faces already seen in the catalogues of the Royal Academy. The Roman models stand for the venerable or patriarchal type, the *dolce far niente* loitering peasant, the assassin, the haughty or scornful character, the standard Domestic Happiness and Holy Family type. Later in 1850 the *Household Words* piece entitled 'The Ghost of Art' utterly dissolves the distance between Rome and London, placing the same nightmare of endless replicas of the same face on a cheap steamboat from Westminster to the Temple. A man, whom he calls "The Ghost of Art," is capable, with appropriate costume and beard, to represent an entire gallery of different characters – and related moralities. Variations in the model's attitudes eventually include the German *Sturm und Drang* type, severity, benevolence, death, adoration, vengeance, Romantic character, jealousy, despair, avarice, rage.[27] This happens to the terror and despair of the art lover, whose visits to the Royal Academy will be plagued by the same face (a Cheshire cat-like grinning epiphany) appearing in every context and thus belittling to one unchanging identity those themes which artists intended to portray with due distinctions of moral emphasis.[28]

On a similar note, but eliciting a smile in the reader with another remark about well-known popular London types, he writes about holy images seen in Rome:

> I freely acknowledge that when I see a Jolly young Waterman representing a cherubim, or a Barclay and Perkins's Drayman depicted as an Evangelist, I see nothing to commend or admire in the performance, however great its reputed Painter. Neither am I partial to libellous Angels, who play on fiddles and bassoons, for the edification of sprawling monks apparently in liquor. Nor to those Monsieur Tonsons of galleries, Saint Francis and Saint Sebastian; both of whom I submit should have very uncommon and rare merits, as works of art, to justify their compound multiplication by Italian painters. (*PfI*, p. 145)

The remark, disposing with apparent lightness of musical angels, inebriated monks, and handsome saints proliferating in Italian churches and art galleries, leads me to the passage in his letters where together with "legions of whining friars and waxy holy families" Dickens humorously dwells on "whole groves of St

27 Dickens, Charles (1997), 'The Ghost of Art' *Selected Journalism, 1850 – 1870*, ed. David Pascoe, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 527 – 33.

28 In *Little Dorrit*, the concept finds perfect application when the villain Blandois poses for the painting of a saint, in Mr Gowan's studio. The only being who reacts to the evil inherent in Blandois is the dog: not fooled by conventions or costumes. Perhaps this should be evaluated from an ecocritical perspective: stressing the common link uniting human animals and animals.

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Sebastians stuck as full of arrows according to pattern as a lying-in pin cushion is stuck with pins."[29]

Actually the painting of St Sebastian by Guido Reni, kept in the Palazzo Rosso collections in Genoa, is the subject of the sexual awakening of the young protagonist in Yukio Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* (1949):

> A remarkably handsome youth was bound naked to the trunk of a tree. His crossed hands were raised high, and the thongs binding his wrists were tied to the tree. No other bonds were visible, and the only covering for the youth's nakedness was a coarse white cloth knotted loosely about his loins […]. Were it not for the arrows with their shafts deeply sunk into his left armpit and right side, he would seem more a Roman athlete resting from fatigue […]. The arrows have eaten into the tense, fragrant, youthful flesh, and are about to consume his body from within with flames of supreme agony and ecstasy. The boy's hands embarked on a motion of which he had no experience […] bringing with it a blinding intoxication. […] Some time passed, and then, with miserable feelings I looked around the desk […]. There were cloud-splashes about […]. Fortunately, a reflex motion of my hand to protect the picture had saved the book from being soiled.[30]

Mishima's book – its epigraph a passage from Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, about the frightening mystery of beauty – revolves upon the discovery of the strong sexual appeal emanated by the portrait of the Christian saint; in addition to this, the beautiful body pierced by arrows suggests a curious mix of pleasure and pain, made of cruelty, sadistic impulse, eroticism.

And whilst from the previous passage in *Pictures from Italy* we may infer Dickens's awareness of the multiple narratives simultaneously ensconced in one single image, the passage in his letter requires his *mot d'esprit* about pincushions in order to bridge the dangers unveiled by Mishima's confession, who also compares the beauty of St Sebastian with Antinous, Hadrian's favourite. And not only the homoerotic appeal lurks in the painting: martyrdom suggests the theme of the sadistic contemplation of cruelty.[31] The connoisseurs' raptures and convulsions take on a different shade of meaning. The same emotions infuse (and do not prevent) Dickens's notice of the "hideous paintings" in Rome in St. Stefano Rotondo, "such a panorama of horror and butchery no man could imagine in his sleep, though he were to eat a whole pig raw, for supper" (*PfI*, p. 136). The jocular remark on the dangers of indigestion briefly elicits the smile of the reader, prior to exposing a whole catalogue of tortures:

29 Burgis, Nina and Kathleen Tillotson et al. eds. (1978), *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 4, 1844 – 1846, Oxford: Clarendon P, p. 277.

30 Mishima, Yukio (1958), *Confessions of a Mask*, London: New Directions.

31 On the subject see Holly Furneaux, 'Sexuality,' *Dickens in Context*, cit., pp. 358 – 64, illustrating the deep complexity of Dickens's representation of sexual matters in his novels.

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> Grey-bearded men being boiled, fried, grilled, crimped, singed, eaten by wild beasts, worried by dogs, buried alive, torn asunder by horses, chopped up small with hatchets: women having their breasts torn with iron pinchers, their tongues cut out, their ears screwed off, their jaws broken, their bodies stretched upon the rack, or skinned upon the stake, or crackled up and melted in the fire: these are among the mildest subjects. (*PfI*, pp. 136 – 37)

The duty of the British traveller requires the enumeration of the horrors of the Counter Reformation, explicitly marked as hideous and disgusting. But the sadistic appetite for images that have to be kept among the unreadable matter of art will again entrance David Copperfield, who delves into "a large quarto edition of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*" (*DC*, p. 203), a precious volume of which, typically, he does not "recollect one word:" "I was chiefly edified, I am afraid, by the pictures, which were numerous, and represented all kinds of dismal horrors" (*DC*, p. 203). Unlike Mishima a hundred years later, David's reaction when watching such images suggests the embarrassment involved in reading the visual, and especially paintings belonging to an age in which ethics and aesthetics differed so much from those of the nineteenth century. David's edification ironically grows out of his private curiosity and attraction for his gold-mine of horrors. And we also know how deeply David responds to the beauty and charm of Steerforth:[32] to the extent that Mishima's raptures for the martyrdom of St Sebastian lurk not so far in the distance, after all.

3. Downcast Eyes: Renaissance and Baroque

The problem of the reception of the Renaissance in Victorian England has to do, essentially, with the notion of beauty. In Victorian times, "the fine arts, including contemporary painting, are associated with heartless sensuality or complacent affluence, whereas nature alone is deemed worthy of supplying a setting for virtue."[33] We have already recalled Dickens's plea for what he considers natural and true: a notion which by involving his moral response tends to perplex his aesthetic choices. The reception of the Italian Renaissance in Victorian England was indeed fraught with moral overtones which would gradually dissolve towards the *fin-de-siècle*.

In 1855 the publication of Michelet's volume on the sixteenth century, in his *Histoire de France*, had established "Renaissance" as the term used to mark out

32 Ciugureanu, Adina (2012), 'Male Bonding in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*' *Dickens's Signs, Readers' Designs: New Bearings in Dickens Criticism*, ed. Francesca Orestano / Norbert Lennartz, Rome: Aracne Editrice, pp. 127 – 41.

33 Penny, Nicholas (2012), p. 32.

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the period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Burckhardt's *Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) would locate this more firmly in Italy.[34] Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) linked "the status of English culture to a historical vision of the Renaissance"[35] viewing it as a model for the present nation. Less favourably, Ruskin would cast the Italian Renaissance against the cherished purity of the Gothic in his *Stones of Venice.*[36] His view was quite influential in establishing the Renaissance as "a kind of imaginative dumping-ground for all that he found politically and spiritually reprehensible in the modern world. So often his blindness to the Renaissance verges on the insensitive, the prejudiced, the perverse."[37] In *The Cicerone. An Art Guide to Painting in Italy for the Use of Travellers and Students*, Jakob Burckhardt had detected the dawning of a new spirit and a different notion of beauty in the religious art of Italy, pointing out why it ceased to be religious:

> In the beginning of the fifteenth century a new spirit entered into the painting of the west. Though still employed in the service of the Church, its principles were henceforward developed without reference to merely ecclesiastical purposes. A work of art now gives more than the Church requires; over and above religious associations, it presents a copy of the real world. […] Simple beauty, which hitherto has been sought for and often found as the highest attribute of the Saints, now gives place to […] a different and sensuous beauty, which must not be stinted its share in the real and earthly […]. [T]he religious element can only assert itself by claiming absolute sway. In itself a negative quantity, it shrinks to nothing when brought into contact with the profane; and when profane elements are purposely introduced into art, the picture necessarily ceases to be religious.[38]

And the whole question of Dickens's reticence in reading the religious paintings of Italy, while on the one hand depending on his personal attraction of repulsion, has to do, on the other, with the strange mingling of pagan and Christian elements in Rome. The Eternal City contains relics, and fragments, and ruins which strangely cohere into

> a vast wilderness of consecrated buildings of all shapes and fancies, blending one with another; of battered pillars of old Pagan temples, dug up from the ground, and forced, like giant captives, to support the roofs of Christian churches; of pictures bad, and

34 McAllister, Annemarie (2007), *John Bull's Italian Snakes and Ladders: English Attitudes to Italy in the mid-Nineteenth Century*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p. 85.

35 Hinojosa, Lynne Walhout (2009), *The Renaissance, English Cultural Nationalism, and Modernism, 1860 – 1920*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 4.

36 Bullen, J.B. (2005), *Continental Crosscurrents. British Criticism and European Art, 1810 – 1910*, Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. 146 – 47.

37 Bullen, J.B. (2005), p. 147.

38 Burckhardt, Jakob (1879), *The Cicerone. An Art Guide to Painting in Italy for the Use of Travellers and Students,* London: John Murray, p. 57.

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> wonderful, and impious, and ridiculous; of kneeling people, curling incense, tinkling bells and […] a swelling organ; of Madonne with their breasts stuck full of swords, arranged in a half-circle like a modern fan; of actual skeletons of dead saints, hideously attired in gaudy satins, silks and velvets trimmed with gold, their withered crust of skull adorned with precious jewels or with chaplets of crushed flowers […]. (*PfI*, pp. 139 – 140)

Pagan and Christian, old and new, dead and alive, pierced tender breasts and mummified skin, imprisoned energy, are all cast in antinomy, yet reveal a disturbing adequacy of function and use of heterogeneous material – blending is the keyword – which upsets chronology, perspective, morality. The notion of the streaked bacon does not hold for the arts of Italy.

Dickens's abhorrence of the frescos by Giulio Romano in the Palazzo Te at Mantua has been extensively quoted; but he also seems to like the frescoes by Luca Cambiaso in the Palazzo Peschiere where he lives in Genoa: "How you may wander on, from room to room, and never tire of the wild fancies on the walls and ceilings, as bright in their fresh colouring as if they had been painted yesterday"(*PfI*, p. 54): these are not natural and true, yet he likes their wild fancies. The giants in Mantua are "unconceivably ugly and grotesque," showing "distortion of look and limb" (*PfI*, p. 93), exaggerated to the point of causing "a violent rush of blood in the head of a spectator." (*PfI*, p. 93). Again the Victorian response is foregrounded, with the physical danger these images may cause in the spectator with their "apoplectic performance" (*PfI*, p. 93); in similar fashion the Correggio's frescoes in the Cupola of the Cathedral only show a garland of bodies, "a labyrinth of arms and legs: such heaps of foreshortened limbs, entangled and involved and jumbled together" (*PfI*, p. 67). The Teatro Farnese, rotting away in rust, rot and mould, is a powerful *memento mori*; the allegory of death pursues our writer even in Venice, where stone balconies at giddy heights, bronze giants and characters in Shakespeare's plays contribute to the fashioning of a theatrical staging of effects (*PfI*, p. 84) and baroque abundance. Rome is where Dickens most resents the baleful effects of the Baroque. While approving of Tintoretto's Assembly of the Blessed, he dislikes Michael Angelo's Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel (*PfI*, p. 145 – 6), and the expressionist statues by Gianlorenzo Bernini, "a breezy maniac" (*PfI*, p. 146) who blows out every bit of drapery, every limb, every possible distortion and contortion making his statues "like a nest of lively snakes" (*PfI*, p. 147).

What we draw from these comments is that Dickens is bewildered by the simultaneous show of pagan and Christian elements, life and death, movement and stillness, saintliness and sensuality, aerial lightness and earthly weight; he resents fragmentation whenever it coheres back into impossible marriages of heterogeneous matter. His eyes are caught in a dizzy oscillation between vantage point and vanishing point. My point now is that this response to Italian art is in

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tone and quality not so different from the assessment Dickens makes of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood paintings displayed in London at the Royal Academy in 1850.

'Old Lamps for New Ones'[39] is the title of a *Household Words* review where he gives full vent to his dislike of the paintings of the PRB, especially of J.E. Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1850). He feels offended. No less than by Giulio Romano in Mantua or Correggio in Parma, he resents the lack of gradual perspective, the foreshortening of limbs, the distorted features of the human body; the excess of realism which simultaneously offers perspective and its contrary, as in Hogarth's *Satire on False Perspective* (1754). The merciless PRB artist has depicted "a hideous, wry-necked, blubbering red-haired boy, in a bed-gown"[40] which should be a portrait of Christ, the madonna, his mother, being "horrible in her ugliness, […] a Monster, in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest gin-shop in England."

> Wherever it is possible to express ugliness of feature, limb, or attitude, you have it expressed. Such men as the carpenters might be undressed in any hospital where dirty drunkards, in a high state of varicose veins are received. Their very toes have walked out of Saint Giles's.[41]

Directly we are reminded of his Italian jokes about ugly madonnas, inebriated monks, Bernini's statues "whose smallest vein, or artery, is as big as an ordinary forefinger" (*PfI*, pp. 146 – 7), and of every "distortion of look and limb" (*PfI*, p. 93) he has seen and described in Italy. In addition to this, he notices in the PRB the "subversion of all known rules and principles of perspective"[42] which gives relief to the wood shavings on the floor of the workshop and to the dirty nails of the human figures. In short, the British artists have turned backwards the course of art history, in the name of their "great retrogressive principle"[43] which entails their forsaking of "all religious aspirations, all elevating thoughts; all tender, awful, sorrowful, ennobling, sacred, graceful, or beautiful association […] for the lowest depths of what is mean, odious, repulsive, and revolting."[44]

These remarks have to be set in the frame of an ethical dislike for what such images portend: and not only the paintings seen in Rome, but now, in 1850, the exhibits at the Royal Academy. It was already hinted at in *Pictures from Italy* that

39 Dickens, Charles (1997), 'Old Lamps for New Ones' *Selected Journalism, 1860 – 1870*, ed. D. Pascoe, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 521 – 26. The piece on the PRB was first published in *Household Words*, 15 June 1850, after the painting *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849 – 50) by J. E. Millais had been exhibited at the Royal Academy.

40 Dickens, Charles (1997), p. 522.

41 Dickens, Charles (1997), p. 523.

42 Ibid., p. 524.

43 Ibid., p. 523.

44 Ibid., p. 522.

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at first sight Rome looks "like LONDON!!!" (*PfI*, p. 115); but the critique of the PRB tightens this proximity, this specularity – causing a disturbing inversion in the progressive course of the Empire, and its glorious history. We read, in this piece, the statement: "This age is so perverse,"[45] which rings like the explicit avowal of a decline.

A few years later, Burckhardt's disciple, Heinrich Wölfflin, would offer a vision of the principles of art independent of any idea of chronological progress, and of a course of moral improvement cast against degeneration. Wölfflin envisaged a sequence of formal categories which could be appreciated in the visual arts, in architecture, in music: linear versus painterly perception, planar versus recessional space articulation, clear versus unclear compositional strategy, restraint versus excess, realism versus artifice and theatricality, freedom versus imprisonment; in Baroque art

> The composition is complex and the forms and motifs bewilderingly profuse, so that the individual part, however large, loses its significance in the masse effect. […] These are the elements that produce the impression of overwhelming and intoxicating lavishness peculiar to the baroque style. […] *One can hardly fail to recognize the affinity that our own age in particular bears to the Italian baroque.* A Richard Wagner appeals to the same emotions […] His conception of art shows a complete correspondence with those of the baroque […]. The spirit of baroque architecture alone possessed the unique power to translate grandeur and loftiness into visible terms. Here we hit the nerve-centre of baroque: it is only able to manifest itself on a grand scale. In church it finds full expression in a kind of intoxication, in the feeling of overwhelmingness and unfathomableness. *The comprehensible is refused, the imagination demands to be overpowered* […]. We are consumed by an all-embracing sensation of heaviness, helpless to grasp anything, wishing to yield totally to the infinite.[46] (my emphasis)

In these principles it is possible to recognise, if not directly the features of Dickensian narrative art culminating in his "large loose baggy monster"[47] *Our Mutual Friend* (1868), at least those images which were set on the cover of so

45 Charles Dickens (1977), p. 521.

46 Wölfflin, Heinrich (1964), *Renaissance and Baroque*, ed. Peter Murray, London: Collins, p. 86; also see Holly, Michael Ann (1994), 'Wölfflin and the Imagining of the Baroque' *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, ed. Norman Bryson et al., Middletown / CT: Wesleyan UP, pp. 437 – 64.

47 Henry James, 'Preface' to *The Tragic Muse,* quoted by Sicher, Efraim (2009/10), 'Reanimation, Regeneration, Re-Evaluation: Rereading *Our Mutual Friend*' *Connotations* 19, pp. 36 – 44; Sicher argues (p. 40) that in OMF "the inversion in the novel of the hierarchy of social and economic value determined by class and gender achieves a carnivalesque effect." It was a fact, apparently, that one *had* on occasion seen two pictures in one; were there not for instance certain sublime Tintorettos at Venice, a measureless Crucifixion in particular, which showed without loss of authority half-a-dozen actions separately taking place? Yes, that might be, but there had surely been nevertheless a mighty pictorial fusion, so that the virtue of composition had somehow thereby come all mysteriously to its own.

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many monthly installments to his novels. Here the eye finds immediate evidence of what, according to Dickens's statements on the Old Masters, should be hardly legible as a feature of Victorian times: namely their overwhelming heaviness, excess, decoration, theatricality, sheer architectural mass and colossal monumentality, breaking of forms, tenseness and violence.

The frontispiece of *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), etched by Hablot Knight Browne – 'Phiz' – recalls Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* (1516–18); the frontispiece by Daniel Maclise for the *Battle of Life* (1846) offers a convulsion of young female bodies and plants not unlike Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Apollo and Daphne; Michael Angelo's *Last Judgement* (1537–41) is echoed by the frontispiece of *David Copperfield* (1850), again by Phiz; and by similar cover designs for the green monthly wrappers of *Dombey and Son* (1848), or *Little Dorrit* (1857), in which intricate masses of bodies, limbs, objects, violently ascend to heaven or drop towards sepulchres, in compositions of overwhelming confusion of hierarchy, blending of animate and inanimate matter, life and death. To quote from Wölfflin:

> It is as if these men no longer have full power over their own bodies, no longer permeate them with their own will; animation and formal articulateness are not equally distributed. To create dissolution, an impression of having been poured, of yielding, of amorphousness, yet leaving certain parts in violent movement; this became the exclusive ideal of art.[48]

Finally the Cupola in Parma with the fresco of *Il paradiso* by Correggio, so harshly criticised by Dickens, not only finds a Victorian replica in the frontispiece of *The Haunted Man* (1848) by Tenniel, with its intricate frieze of twisted limbs, but also, on Dickens's death in June 1870, in the commemorative etching by Samuel F. Poulton, in which his head is enclosed in a garland of triumphant clouds among which his characters appear like so many saints in heaven.

These compositions are indeed baroque, despite, or exactly because they defy legibility. What was hard to read in the Victorian age, was, visibly, under Dickens's and his readers' eyes.

48 Wölfflin, Heinrich, *Renaissance and Baroque*, p. 81.

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