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The Manner of Character Evolution in Charles Dicken's Works

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ABSTRACT: Charles Dickens is generally considered the greatest English novelist of the Victorian era. He populated his novels and other works with dozens of distinctive characters. As his career progressed, Dickens's fame and the demand for his public readings were unparalleled. In 1868 The Times wrote, "Amid all the variety of 'readings', those of Mr Charles Dickens stand alone."^[10] A Dickens biographer, Edgar Johnson, wrote in the 1950s: "It was [always] more than a reading; it was an extraordinary exhibition of acting that seized upon its auditors with a mesmeric possession."^[10] Juliet John backed the claim for Dickens "to be called the first self-made global media star of the age of mass culture."^[226] Comparing his reception at public readings to those of a contemporary pop star, The Guardian states, "People sometimes fainted at his shows. His performances even saw the rise of that modern phenomenon, the 'speculator' or ticket tout (scalpers) – the ones in New York City escaped detection by borrowing respectable-looking hats from the waiters in nearby restaurants."^[227]

"Dickens's vocal impersonations of his own characters gave this truth a theatrical form: the public reading tour. No other Victorian could match him for celebrity, earnings, and sheer vocal artistry. The Victorians craved the author's multiple voices: between 1853 and his death in 1870, Dickens performed about 470 times."

KEYWORDS-charles dickens, novels, character, evolution, public, readingsa

I. INTRODUCTION

This list identifies more than 40 of the most notable ones. All works are identified by the date and form of their first publication.

Inspector Bucket

Inspector Bucket is the detective who solves the mystery of Dickens's novel Bleak House (serialized 1852–53). For Dickens's 19th-century readers, his colourless but skillful and decent methods became the standards by which to judge all policemen. Bucket has been called the first important detective in English literature. Husky and middle-aged with a friendly and honest appearance, he has a temperament that renders him philosophical and tolerant of human follies. Nevertheless, his tenacity and omnipresence are his outstanding qualities as a policeman, as he patiently walks the streets or observes people in their homes. His wife helps him solve the murder that is the central mystery of the novel.

Little Nell

Little Nell is a frail child who is a major figure in Dickens's novel The Old Curiosity Shop (serialized 1840–41). His account of her death after many vicissitudes is often considered the apotheosis of Victorian sentimentality.[1,2,3]

Ebenezer Scrooge

Ebenezer Scrooge is the irascible businessman who is the protagonist of Dickens's tale A Christmas Carol, published in book form in 1843. Despite his transformation at the end of the story, he is more often remembered today as the embittered miser and not as the reformed sinner, and the word scrooge has entered the English language as a synonym for a miserly person.

Seth Pecksniff

Seth Pecksniff is an unctuous English architect whose insincere behaviour made the name Pecksniff synonymous with hypocrisy. He appears in Dickens's novel Martin Chuzzlewit (serialized 1843–44).

David Copperfield

David Copperfield is the young hero of Dickens's semiautobiographical novel *David Copperfield* (serialized 1849–50).

Mrs. Jellyby

Mrs. Jellyby is a satiric character in Dickens's novel *Bleak House* (serialized 1852–53) and one of his more memorable caricatures. Matronly Mrs. Jellyby is a philanthropist who devotes her time and energy to setting up a mission in Africa while ignoring the needy in her own family and neighbourhood.

Uriah Heep

Uriah Heep is the villain in Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* (serialized 1849–50). The name Uriah Heep has become a byword for a falsely humble hypocrite.

Oliver Twist

Oliver Twist is a young orphan who is the hero of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (serialized 1837–39), a novel that illustrates how poverty nurtures crime.

Samuel Pickwick

Samuel Pickwick is the kindly protagonist of Dickens's first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (serialized 1836–37). He is the head of the group of friends known as the Pickwick Club whose adventures the novel documents.

Madame Defarge

Madame Thérèse Defarge is a character in Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (serialized and published in book form 1859), which is set during the French Revolution. A symbol of vengefulness and revolutionary excess, Madame Defarge sits outside her Paris wine shop endlessly knitting a scarf that is—in effect—a list of those to be killed. Incorporated into the scarf's pattern are the names of hated aristocrats—including the St. Evrémondés, the family of Charles Darnay, a leading character.

Sam Weller

Sam Weller is a humorous Cockney bootblack who becomes Samuel Pickwick's devoted companion and servant in Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (serialized 1836–37).

Lady Dedlock

In Dickens's novel *Bleak House* (serialized 1852–53) Lady Dedlock is a beautiful woman who harbours the secret that she bore a daughter before her marriage to a wealthy baronet. Privilege and wealth have not fulfilled her expectations of life. When she learns that her daughter is alive and that her own past is in danger of being exposed, she runs away in shame and despair.

Nicholas Nickleby

Nicholas Nickleby is the protagonist of Dickens's novel *Nicholas Nickleby* (serialized 1838–39).

Miss Havisham

Miss Havisham is a half-crazed, embittered jilted bride in Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* (serialized 1860–61).

Tiny Tim

Tiny Tim is the physically disabled young son of Bob Cratchit, clerk to the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge, in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (published in book form in 1843). Tim's father is underpaid and overworked by Scrooge, and he does not have the money needed to cure Tiny Tim. The boy is fated to die young unless he receives proper treatment, but his spirit is strong and generous even as he becomes physically weaker. He has only kind, cheerful thoughts and words of encouragement for all, typified by his toast "God bless us, every one!"

Edwin Drood

Edwin Drood is the alleged victim in Dickens's unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (written 1870).

Esther Summerson

Esther Summerson is the strong, motherly heroine of Dickens's novel *Bleak House* (serialized 1852–53).

Sairey Gamp

Sairey Gamp, a comic character in Dickens's novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (serialized 1843–44), is a high-spirited old Cockney who is a sketchily trained nurse-midwife as enthusiastic at laying out a corpse as she is at delivering a baby.

The Artful Dodger

In Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (serialized 1837–39) the Artful Dodger is a precocious streetwise boy who introduces the protagonist Oliver to the thief Fagin and his gang of children, who work as thieves and pickpockets.

Jacob Marley[4,5,6]

Jacob Marley is the deceased business partner of Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (published in book form in 1843). Marley's ghost visits Scrooge on Christmas Eve at the beginning of the story.

Gradgrind

In Dickens's novel *Hard Times* (serialized and published in book form in 1854) Gradgrind is the proprietor of an experimental school where only facts are taught. For Dickens he embodies the unsympathetic qualities of the utilitarian social philosophy prevalent in Victorian England.

Charles Darnay

Charles Darnay—the byname of Charles St. Evrémonde—is one of the protagonists of Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (serialized and published in book form in 1859). He is a highly principled young French aristocrat who is caught up in the events leading up to the French Revolution and is saved from the guillotine by Sydney Carton.

Mr. Bumble

Mr. Bumble is the cruel, pompous beadle of the poorhouse where the orphaned Oliver Twist is raised in Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* (serialized 1837–39). The word bumbledom, derived from his name, characterizes the meddlesome self-importance of the petty bureaucrat. Mr. Bumble marries the poorhouse matron, Mrs. Corney, a tyrannical woman who completely dominates him. In response to learning that a husband bears legal responsibility for his wife's actions, Mr. Bumble utters the often-quoted line "If the law supposes that—the law is a ass." The Bumbles become paupers in the same poorhouse where they once inflicted such damage and unhappiness.

Infant Phenomenon

Infant Phenomenon—the byname of Ninetta Crummles—is a child performer who appears in Dickens's novel *Nicholas Nickleby* (serialized 1838–39). Ninetta is the beloved eight-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Crummles, the managers of a troupe of strolling players in which Nicholas Nickleby is a performer.

Jarndyce family

The Jarndyces are the family of principal characters of Dickens's novel *Bleak House* (serialized 1852–53). The dreary, seemingly endless Jarndyce v. Jarndyce lawsuit contesting a will provides the background for the novel.

Pip

Pip is the young orphan whose growth and development are the subject of Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* (serialized 1860–61).

Sydney Carton

Sydney Carton is one of the protagonists of Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (serialized and published in book form in 1859). He first appears as a cynical drunkard who serves as a legal aide to a London barrister. He is secretly in love with Lucie Manette, whose French émigré husband, Charles Darnay, physically resembles Carton. This coincidence enables Carton to stand in for Darnay, who has been sentenced to die on the guillotine. By this act Carton gives meaning to his misspent life.

Fagin

Fagin is one of the villains in Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* (serialized 1837–39) and one of the most notorious anti-Semitic portraits in English literature. He is an old man in London who teaches young homeless boys how to be pickpockets and then fences their stolen goods. Although a miser and exploiter, he shows a certain loyalty and solicitude toward the boys. The Artful Dodger is one of Fagin's thieves and, for a time, so is the young Oliver Twist. At the novel's end Fagin is executed for complicity in a murder.

Bill Sikes

Bill Sikes is a violent, brutish thief and burglar in Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* (serialized 1837–39).

Clara Peggotty

Clara Peggotty is a devoted servant in Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* (serialized 1849–50).

Abel Magwitch

Abel Magwitch is an escaped convict who plays a major role in the growth and development of Pip, the protagonist in Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* (serialized 1860–61).

Cratchit family

The Cratchits are an impoverished, hardworking, and warmhearted family in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (published in book form in 1843). The family comprises Bob Cratchit, his wife, and their six children: Martha, Belinda, Peter, two smaller Cratchits (an unnamed girl and boy), and the ever-cheerful Tiny Tim.

Flora Finching^[7,8,9]

In Dickens's novel *Little Dorrit* (serialized 1855–57) Flora Finching, the daughter of mean-spirited Christopher Casby, is a widow who was once a sweetheart of Arthur Clennam and still cherishes a passion for him. Now middle-aged, she is kindhearted and sympathetic.

Richard Carstone

Richard Carstone is the heir of John Jarndyce in Dickens's *Bleak House* (serialized 1852–53).

Josiah Bounderby

Josiah Bounderby is a wealthy businessman in Dickens's novel *Hard Times* (serialized and published in book form 1854). He uses everyone around him to further his own interests. He keeps the existence of his mother a secret as he perpetuates the myth that he began life as an orphan who had to struggle to survive and to establish himself.

Mr. Merdle

Mr. Merdle is a financier in Dickens's novel *Little Dorrit* (serialized 1855–57).

Mr. Jaggers

Mr. Jaggers is the honest and pragmatic lawyer in Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* (serialized 1860–61) who handles the affairs of the protagonist Pip as well as those of most of the characters in the book.



Alexander and Lucie Manette

Alexander Manette is a French doctor, and Lucie is his daughter, in Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (serialized and published in book form 1859).

Arthur Clennam

Arthur Clennam is the kindly middle-aged man who loves Amy Dorrit, the heroine of Dickens's novel *Little Dorrit* (serialized 1855–57).

Joe Gargery

Joe Gargery is the kindhearted and loyal blacksmith who is married to Pip's mean-spirited sister in Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* (serialized 1860–61).

Martin Chuzzlewit

Martin Chuzzlewit is the protagonist of Dickens's novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (serialized 1843–44). He is an apprentice architect who is fired by Seth Pecksniff and disinherited by his grandfather; he travels with a servant, Mark Tapley, to the United States, where they are swindled and have other adventures.

II. DISCUSSION

characters in Dickens' novels are real in the same way that characters in plays are real, and in the same way, perhaps, that living people seem real to each other. Their true identities are masked even from themselves under conventionally prescribed poses, yet declare themselves through all kinds of surface clues: not only in the overt act, but in its accompanying gesture and facial expression; not just in the spoken word, but in the intonation and turn of speech with which it is uttered. Dickens' method of characterization does not allow for the delicate probing of psychological states of mind; rather its success depends on the artist's resourcefulness in creating consistent and emphatically defined patterns of individualized responses to external circumstance; in showing, that is to say, character in action. Like Browning's *Fra Lippo*, whose "soul and sense" grew "sharp alike" through early neglect, Dickens might have traced to his waiflike boyhood in the London streets his preternatural aliveness to "the look of things," the tokens of dress or mannerism which differentiate one personage from another. But unless this acuity of vision had been tempered by the additional faculties of insatiable curiosity about human behavior [115/116] and a genial, if sometimes caustic, sympathy with its oddities, the novelist would never have achieved the comprehensive humanity which informs his attitude towards his creatures. "His genius," Forster well remarked, "was his fellow feeling with his race; his mere personality was never the bound or limit to his perceptions, however strongly sometimes it might colour them...."

Incredible though they often are, the beings who populate Dickens' stories command assent because of the vitality imparted to them by their creator's own transparent belief in their reality. "No man," according to Forster, "had ever so surprising a faculty as Dickens of becoming himself what he was representing . . ."; and the critic George Henry Lewes wrote: "Dickens once declared to me that every word said by his characters was distinctly heard by him...." These statements are corroborated by Mary Dickens' account of seeing her father act out the fictional roles which he was imagining. The novelist's instructions to his illustrators are further evidence of the fact that his characters had assumed in the mind's eye the lineaments of living people. And frequent references to works in hand indicate the extent to which the writer became immersed in the lives of their characters. As he approached the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, he confessed to his future biographer: "I went to bed last night utterly dispirited and done up. All night I have been pursued by the child; and this morning I am unrefreshed and miserable." Of the emotional toll exacted by his Christmas book, "The Chimes," he wrote to Forster:

Since I conceived, at the beginning of the second part, what must happen in the third, I have undergone as much sorrow and agitation as if the thing were real; and have [116/117] wakened up with it at night. I was obliged to lock myself in when I finished it yesterday, for my face was swollen for the time to twice its proper size, and was hugely ridiculous.



Forster is undoubtedly correct in associating Dickens' closeness to his characters with his keen dramatic sense:

He had the power of projecting himself into shapes and suggestions of his fancy which is one of the marvels of creative imagination, and what he desired to express he became. The assumptions of the theatre have the same method at a lower pitch, depending greatly on personal accident; but the accident as much as the genius favoured Dickens, and another man's conception underwent in his acting the process which in writing he applied to his own.

E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* drew on Dickens to illustrate his theoretical disapproval of two-dimensional or "flat" characters. Yet, impressed by the "wonderful feeling of human depth" conveyed by many of these figures, he had to concede that the novelist's "immense success with types suggests that there may be more in flatness than the severer critics admit." Forster's argument had in part been anticipated by George Santayana in an important essay on Dickens. No one has better described the conventional point of view which finds it more comfortable to pretend that Dickens is a mere caricaturist:

He was the perfect comedian. When people say Dickens exaggerates, it seems to me they can have no eyes and no ears. They probably have only notions of what things and people are; they accept them conventionally, at their diplomatic value. Their minds run on in the region of safe discourse, where there are masks only and no faces, ideas and no facts; they have little sense for those living grimaces that play from moment to moment upon the [117/118] countenance of the world. The world is a perpetual caricature of itself; at every moment it is the mockery and the contradiction of what it is pretending to be. But as it nevertheless intends all the time to be something different and highly dignified, at the next moment it corrects and checks and tries to cover up the absurd thing it was, so that a conventional world, a world of masks, is superimposed on the reality, and passes in every sphere of human interest for the reality itself. Humour is the perception of this illusion, the fact allowed to pierce here and there through the convention, whilst the convention continues to be maintained, as if we had not observed its absurdity. Pure comedy is more radical, cruder, in a certain sense less human; because comedy throws the convention over altogether, revels for a moment in the fact, and brutally says to the notions of mankind, as if it slapped them in the face, There, take that! That's what you really are! At this the polite world pretends to laugh, not tolerantly as it does at humour, but a little angrily. It does not like to see itself by chance in the glass, without having had time to compose its features for demure self-contemplation. "What a bad mirror," it exclaims, "it must be concave or convex; for surely I never looked like that. Mere caricature, farce and horse play. Dickens exaggerates; I never was so sentimental as that, I never saw anything so dreadful; I don't believe there were ever any people like Quilp, or Squeers, or Serjeant Buzfuz." But the polite world is lying; there are such people; we are such people ourselves in our true moments, in our veritable impulses; but we are careful to stifle and hide those moments from ourselves and from the world; to purse and pucker ourselves into the mask of our conventional personality, and so simpering, we profess that it is very coarse and inartistic of Dickens to undo our life's work for us in an instant and to remind us of what we are.

There is no reason to quarrel with Forster's assertion that Dickens' characters ultimately derive from the "humours" of Jonsonian comedy — *Every Man in His Humour*, it will be remembered, was the first play to be performed by Dickens' amateur company, with the novelist himself in the part of Bobadill. But too much [118/119] has been made of their typological aspect. Although Dickens did not work from living models, he often combined in one figure traits taken from different individuals, or, conversely, distributed among several characters the qualities observed in a single great eccentric. When the chiropodist, Mrs. Hill, protested against her portrait as Miss Mowcher in *David Copperfield*, Dickens retorted that all his characters "being made out of many people, were composite and never individual." Some of the foibles of John Dickens crop up in John Jarndyce and William Dorrit, as well as in Micawber. The originality which Dickens exercised in naming characters suggests that they were never conceived purely as types. Bumble and Bounderby and Pumblechook are all blustering and officious fools; but as the connotations of their names betoken, generic likeness is sunk in idiosyncratic aberrations from the norm.

Like seventeenth-century "humorous" characters and their progeny in the novels of Smollett and Fielding, the immortal comic and grotesque creations of Dickens' early period spring full-blown into existence, with no possibility or need for further growth.[10,11,12] The scenes in which they appear are dramatically constructed to allow them to appear "in character," as it were. Thus it may be said that in the novels from *Pickwick Papers* to *Martin Chuzzlewit* the action reveals, but does not develop, character. Chesterton shrewdly observed of Dickens' practice at this time in his career: ". . . the moving machinery exists only to display entirely static character. Things in the Dickens story shift and change only in order to give us glimpses of great characters that do not change at all."

Chesterton's statement, however, does not make sufficient allowance for the surprise and pleasure [119/120] attending progressive revelation. While characters certainly do not change in the sense that they are psychologically transformed, their experiences lead to behavior so unpredictable that growing familiarity is attended by a constant sense



of discovery. This developing awareness, indeed, is a refraction of Dickens' own delight in creation. With regard to Pecksniff and Jonas Chuzzlewit he wrote Forster, while Martin Chuzzlewit was in progress:

As to the way in which these characters have opened out, that is to me one of the most surprising processes of the mind in this sort of invention. Given what one knows, what one does not know springs up; and I am as absolutely certain of its being true, as I am of the law of gravitation — if such a thing be possible — more so.

In Dickens' world character is never so inscrutable as the circumstances which bring out its inherent potentialities. Those two amiable buffoons, Dick Swiveller and Toots, need only to fall in love to become themselves lovable. And from that trio of limply fatuous aristocrats, Cousin Feenix, Sir Leicester Dedlock, and Twemlow, loyalty to the traditional values of their order calls forth a wholly admirable display of dignity.

Much as has been written about Dickens' supreme humorous figures, they resist critical analysis. Like their compeers, the great originals of Shakespearean comedy, they enjoy a free and autonomous life, uncircumscribed by the works in which they appear. Theirs is the license traditionally accorded the clown, whose antic disposition is a law unto itself. The Dickensian comic spirit is unfailingly embodied in histrionic guise. Its exemplars are self-declared fantasts, "of imagination all compact." They inhabit a world [120/121] of their own making, a world which parodies, yet exists in total defiance of reality, a world in which the distinction between shadow and substance is turned topsy-turvy. At the outset stands Sam Weller with his inexhaustible store of analogues deriving from the absurd reactions of nonexistent beings caught in preposterous predicaments, and at the end there is Wegg, vicariously involved in the doings of his imaginary "Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker." In between comes Sairey Gamp, not by any stretch of the fancy to be divorced from her fictitious confidante, Mrs. Harris.

These beings live by the power of the spoken word, though each has appropriated the resources of language for ends that subvert all habitual channels of communication. For them words are magic talismans, expressive of a perpetual state of wish-fulfillment, reordering actuality into conformity with felt needs. Dick Swiveller's idiom with its hodgepodge of music hall clichés provides the same escape from an impoverished present that Flora Finching finds in the lunatic disarray of her recollections. There is no disappointment for which Micawber cannot compensate by the triumphant exercise of his epistolary style. Like Falstaff and the other clowns in Shakespeare, Dickens' comedians are fully self-aware. They enact their roles quite as much for their own delectation as to impose on their auditors, even though, as the novelist said, "My figures seem disposed to stagnate without crowds about them." "The great fool," Chesterton wrote, "is he in whom we cannot tell which is the conscious and which the unconscious humour." This ambiguity characterizes all of Dickens' greatest comic scenes, but none more than those in which Micawber appears. There is, for example, the unforgettable episode when David, about to part from his friends, receives [121/122] the following lecture on the future conduct of his affairs:

We had a very pleasant day, though we were all in a tender state about our approaching separation.

"I shall never, Master Copperfield," said Mrs. Micawber, "revert to the period when Mr. Micawber was in difficulties, without thinking of you. Your conduct has always been of the most delicate and obliging description. You have never been a lodger; you have been a friend."

"My dear," said Mr. Micawber, "Copperfield," for so he had been accustomed to call me of late, "has a heart to feel for the distresses of his fellow-creatures when they are behind a cloud, and a head to plan, and a hand to — in short, a general ability to dispose of such available property as could be made away with."

I expressed my sense of this commendation, and said I was very sorry we were going to lose one another.

"My dear young friend," said Mr. Micawber, "I am older than you; a man of some experience in life, and -- and of some experience, in short, in difficulties, generally speaking. At present, and until something turns up (which I am, I may say, hourly expecting), I have nothing to bestow but advice. Still my advice is so far worth taking that — in short, that I have never taken it myself, and am the" — here Mr. Micawber, who had been beaming and smiling, all over his head and face, up to the present moment, checked himself and frowned — "the miserable wretch you behold."

"My dear Micawber!" urged his wife.



"I say," returned Mr. Micawber, quite forgetting himself and smiling again, "the miserable wretch you behold. My advice is, never to do to-morrow what you can do to-day. Procrastination is the thief of time. Collar him!"

"My poor papa's maxim," Mrs. Micawber observed.

"My dear," said Mr. Micawber, "your papa was very well in his way, and Heaven forbid that I should disparage him. Take him for all in all, we ne'er shall — in short, make the acquaintance, probably, of anybody else possessing, at his time of life, the same legs for gaiters, and able to read the same description of print without spectacles. But he applied that maxim to our marriage, [122/123] my dear; and that was so far prematurely entered into, in consequence, that I never recovered the expense."

Mr. Micawber looked aside at Mrs. Micawber, and added, "Not that I am sorry for it. Quite the contrary, my love." After that he was grave for a minute or so. "My other piece of advice, Copperfield," said Mr. Micawber, "you know. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pound ought and six, result misery. The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered, the God of day goes down upon the dreary scene, and — and in short you are for ever flooded. As I am!"

To make his example more impressive, Mr. Micawber drank a glass of punch with an air of great enjoyment and satisfaction, and whistled the College Hornpipe.

The lesser comic characters in Dickens exhibit the same extraordinary resilience and imaginative supremacy over adversity, born of an unquenchable inclination to idealize reality. The novels are thronged with individuals who thus get along on theatrical make-believe. Their company includes such foolish widows as Mrs. Nickleby and Mrs. Sparsit; humble artisans whose fancies are related to their callings like Miss La Creevy and Jenny Wren; social impostors like Turve-drop and Mrs. General, with her fixation on the "formation of a surface"; would-be philosophers, such as the likable Captain Cuttle and the detestable Skimpole.

It is a recognized fact that Dickens' humorous vein runs most richly through the early novels. Its thinning out and turning acrid in the later work is commonly attributed to a decline in the exuberant optimism of the youthful years. But there are other reasons for this apparent loss of comic verve more closely allied with Dickens' artistic development. Professors Butt and Tillotson have shown in *Dickens at Work* that on the [123/124]rare occasions in his later career when the novelist overwrote his monthly numbers, comic passages were always the first to be sacrificed to space requirements. The increasingly rigorous plot construction, first manifest in *Dombey and Son*, entailed a more functional view of characterization. Such characters as Major Bagstock, Bounderby, and Podsnap are creatures of their environments, giving lip service to the values on which worldly reputation depends. In contrast to the freedom enjoyed by their predecessors in the early stories who belong to no definable social class, these figures do not create for themselves private roles to satisfy the hunger of the imagination, but rather strut and fret through public parts, prescribed by their notion of what is expected of them. As a result, their playacting, expressive of the author's satiric intent, no longer provokes the untrammelled laughter of a Sam Weller or Mrs. Gamp or Micawber.

Strangely akin to these embodiments of the pure comic spirit are the grotesque villains of Dickens' early writings. Fagin, Squeers, Quilp, Pecksniff, even Uriah Heep, are only to be distinguished from their antic counterparts by a greater inclination and capacity to cause hurt. Like the clowns, their unflinching vivacity and resourcefulness constantly defy narrative restraint, so that the scenes in which they appear seem staged to release their sinister hilarity. Condemnable though these figures may be, moral reprobation sinks before the spectacle of Fagin schooling his gang of pick-pockets, or Quilp bullying his wife by a display of indiscriminate voracity, or Pecksniff liquorishly fondling Mary Graham. For these characters also make an enduring appeal through their histrionic virtuosity. Old Martin Chuzzlewit is in reality paying grudging tribute to this faculty when he says to Pecksniff: [124/125]

"Why, the annoying quality in you, is . . . that you never had a confederate or partner in your juggling; you would deceive everybody, even those who practise the same art; and have a way with you, as if you — he, he, he! — as if you really believed yourself. I'd lay a handsome wager now, . . . if I laid wagers, which I don't and never did, that you keep up appearances by a tacit understanding, even before your own daughters here.... You're not offended, Pecksniff?"

"Offended, my good sir!" cried that gentleman, as if he had received the highest compliments that language could convey.



In the later novels evil-doing, as has been said, is presented under an institutionalized aspect; and the villains, as a general rule, no longer exhibit the same malignant joy in wrong for its own sake. Already in *Barnaby Rudge*, Dennis the hangman condones his scoundrelism by appealing to the punitive legal system of which he is a minion; and so barefaced a malefactor as Blandois in *Little Dorrit* repeatedly insists that he is a gentleman who conducts himself no whit differently from respectable members of the business and professional classes. Yet, although the behavior of a *Dombey* or a *Tulkinghorn* or a *Madame Defarge* is in part explicable by class affiliation, the rampant evil in Dickens' world cannot finally be assimilated to any social system. There lurks at its heart an insoluble element suggestive of the novelist's ambivalent attitude toward the sources of human motivation.

Much of the time Dickens seems to have subscribed to the teaching of the political economists that individuals are shaped by environment. Monks' diabolical plot against Oliver is based on the assumption that the boy cannot avoid being contaminated by association with Fagin and his gang. "The wily old Jew," Dickens writes, "had the boy in his toils. Having prepared his [125/126] mind, by solitude and gloom, to prefer any society to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place, he was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue for ever." Similarly, of Nicholas Mickleby's appalled recognition that Dotheboys Hall is a spawning-ground for every kind of vice, the novelist says:

But the pupils — the young noblemen! How the last faint traces of hope, the remotest glimmering of any good to be derived from his efforts in this den, faded from the mind of Nicholas as he looked in dismay around! Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness of distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining; there were vicious-faced boys, brooding, with leaden eyes, like malefactors in a jail; and there were young creatures on whom the sins of their frail parents had descended, weeping even for the mercenary nurses they had known, and lonesome even in their loneliness. With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can foster in swollen hearts, eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding here!

The warped natures of Smike in *Nicolas Nickleby* and of Hugh in *Barnaby Rudge* are alike referable to [126/127] early neglect and maltreatment. And in the Preface to *Martin Chuzzlewit* Dickens, somewhat unconvincingly, attempts to explain Jonas' criminal disposition on the same grounds:

I conceive that the sordid coarseness and brutality of Jonas would be unnatural, if there had been nothing in his early education, and in the precept and example always before him, to engender and develop the vices that make him odious. But, so born and so bred, admired for that which made him hateful, and justified from his cradle in cunning, treachery, and avarice; I claim him as the legitimate issue of the father upon whom those vices are seen to recoil.

At other times Dickens' division of his characters into camps, opposing unassailable virtue to immitigable depravity, points to an essentially Manichaean habit of mind. In answer to the charge that the portraiture of Sikes was too unrelieved in its darkness, the author offered the following tentative excuse in the Preface to *Oliver Twist*:

. . . I fear there are in the world some insensible and callous natures, that do become utterly and incurably bad. Whether this be so or not, of one thing I am certain: that there are such men as Sikes, who, being closely followed through the same space of time and through the same current of circumstances, would not give, by the action of a moment, the faintest indication of a better nature.

In the same novel the half brothers, Monks and Oliver, stand in implausibly stark contrast. The malevolent motivation of the one is as incomprehensible as is the other's innate innocence, given the conditions under which he grows up. A similar polarity of moral absolutes creates an unbridgeable gulf between Quilp and Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. [13,14,15]

Sceptical of organized charity and all other official agencies for reform, Dickens relied on individual benevolence to relieve suffering and misfortune. In the early novels, as has been noted, this mission is entrusted to the company of affluent and compassionate elders which includes Pickwick, Brownlow, the Cheeryble brothers, Garland, old Martin Chuzzlewit, Betsey Trotwood, and John Jarndyce. Although the Cheeryble brothers were inspired by a pair of



philanthropic Manchester industrialists, Dickens' portrayal of this type is so deliberately lacking in realism that one may doubt whether its exemplars were ever actual to their creator in other than a symbolic sense. Their Olympian hovering over the action of the stories, on which they fortuitously intervene at opportune moments, suggests that they belong to a transcendent order representative of ideal charity. Esther Summerson, indeed, acknowledges as much when she admits at the end of *Bleak House* to feeling towards John Jarndyce "as if he were a superior being. . . ."

Dickens' growing insight during the 1840s into the organic constitution of Victorian society led to important developments in his methods of presenting character, as well as to the perfecting of his narrative art. A shift in perspective is reflected in the very titles of the later novels. In contrast to the early works named after their protagonists, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Nobody's Fault* (the original title of *Little Dorrit*), *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend* call attention to the new emphasis on theme within an expanding social focus. Edmund Wilson was the first to point out that Dickens originated "a new literary genre . . . the novel of the social group." Beginning with *Dombey and Son*, there is an increasing interaction between characters and their cultural milieu. Motivation is determined more by [128/129] environmental pressures and less by the impulses of the isolated and unrestrained ego. Society has assumed the role of corporate villain, and individual malefactions are made to seem symptomatic of prevalent abuses. The victimized child is a recurrent figure in Dickens' fiction from his earliest work; but in the mature novels the all but universal neglect or abuse of children by their parents is systematically elaborated as one of the signs of the times. *Dombey's* pride, so fatal to the happiness of his family, is a class pride, typifying the irresponsible exercise of authority by those in positions of rank and power. The novelist ironically poses the question: "Was Mr. Dombey's master-vice, that ruled him so inexorably, an unnatural characteristic?" And he goes on: "It might be worth while, sometimes, to inquire what Nature is, and how men work to change her, and whether, in the enforced distortions so produced, it is not natural to be unnatural." Given a social order dedicated to the perversion of all natural bonds, there is little to choose between Dombey and all the other heartlessly self-infatuated parents, including Mrs. Jellyby, Gradgrind, William Dorrit, Podsnap.

Such is the power of institutionalized evil in these later novels that individual philanthropy is of little avail. John Jarndyce is helpless to safeguard his wards, and Boffin seems almost to have been conceived as a parody of the Pickwickian savior. In Dickens' early work, charity exists as a transcendent ideal, invading the stories from outside in the persons of altruistic, but essentially disengaged, benefactors. Florence Dombey embodies the emergence of a new type to embody the regenerative power of love, now represented as inhering within the social scene. She is the first of the suffering girl heroines who play a redemptive role in most of the subsequent novels. The category includes, [129/130] in addition to Florence, Agnes Wickfield, Esther Summerson, Sissy Jupe, Amy Dorrit, Lizzie Hexam. There is an unmistakable family likeness among these characters. A development from the lost children, *Oliver Twist* and *Nell*, of the earlier works, they exhibit in fusion a number of traditional strains associated with the archetypal figure of the saintly innocent, as variously endorsed by New Testament Christianity and the romantic glorification of childhood.

The type can be enlarged to include the actual fools who so often originate or are the occasion for meritorious actions in Dickens' fiction: Smike, Barnaby Rudge, Mr. Dick, Maggy in *Little Dorrit*, perhaps even Joe Gargery. Henry James, who was less than sympathetic with these characters, wrote of Jenny Wren in his review of *Our Mutual Friend*: "Like all Mr. Dickens's pathetic characters, she is a little monster, . . . she belongs to the troop of hunchbacks, imbeciles, and precocious children, who have carried on the sentimental business in all Mr. Dickens's novels, the little Nells, the Smikes the Paul Dombeyes."

In virtually every respect, save incorruptibility of heart, they stand at the farthest remove from the images of paternal benignity. Whereas Pickwick and his successors are aging and securely prosperous members of the middle class, these figures are young girls, usually destitute and invariably unprotected. Esther is illegitimate; Sissy and Lizzie come from the dregs of society and are illiterate. All have lost their mothers and have been neglected or otherwise mistreated by fathers or surrogate parents. They resemble each other in additional ways, which doubtless reflect Dickens' dislike of his own disorderly family life. They share with their creator, for example, a kind of passion for tidiness in their domestic arrangements. Of *Nell*, who is in many ways the progenitor of the type, Gissing wrote: "From the beginning of the story, when she is seen making order and comfort in the gloomy old house, to the end of her wanderings in the cottage by [130/131] the still churchyard, her one desire is for the peace and security of home." Furthermore, like *Nell*, Dickens' later heroines habitually reverse the customary pattern of familial responsibility, the daughter assuming the place of mother and wife to the erring father. In every case the sovereign virtue which enables these beings to remain irreproachably immaculate amidst all the evil which environs them is a spiritual holiness based on unreflecting trust in divine providence. And their indubitable role in their respective narratives is to embody the dynamic power of love, as a touchstone for making moral discriminations among the actions of all the other characters.



Although Dickens' girl heroines are much more vitally involved in their stories than the patriarchal benefactors whom they replace, they, like all of the novelist's creatures who conform to type, are conceived in fundamentally static terms. They are, however, frequently played off against a very different kind of female character who testifies to Dickens' growing concern with the psychological grounds of internal conflict. For the later novels present a remarkable series of women of passionate temperament, whose outbursts of feeling and reckless actions signify divided natures. They all, for one reason or another, have been humiliated, placed on the defensive, and relegated to the position of outsiders by society, with which they seek to get even for their wounded self-esteem. Their number includes Edith Dombey, Rosa Dartle, Lady Dedlock and Hortense, Louisa Gradgrind, Fanny Dorrit, Miss Wade and Tattycoram, and, with significant differences, Estella and Bella Wilfer. Whether innocent or guilty, all these fear, while at the same time they resent and defy, the tyranny of opinion. The sympathy which they in part compel as victims under a moral code inequitable in its oppression of their sex [131/132] is counteracted by their erratic response to fancied grievances. For all, like Miss Wade, are neurotic self-tormentors, riven between hatred against those who have used them and against themselves for submitting to be so used. Dickens, however, could never rival Richardson or Charlotte Brontë in fineness of insight into the feminine nature; and the interest which these characters arouse is dissipated through such anticlimactic scenes as that between Edith Dombey and Carker, or Rosa Dartle and Emily, or Louisa Gradgrind and her father on the night of Harthouse's attempted seduction.

Forster perceptively observed of Dickens' methods of characterization that no man could better adjust the outward and visible oddities in a delineation to its inner and unchangeable veracities. The rough estimates we form of character, if we have any truth of perception, are on the whole correct: but men touch and interfere with one another by the contact of their extremes, and it may very often become necessarily the main business of a novelist to display the salient points, the sharp angles, or the prominences merely.

While generally true enough, this statement fails to take into account Dickens' fascination with the phenomenon of split personality or to give credit to his techniques for dramatizing the buried motives which individuals keep hidden from the world and even from themselves. That the writer had developed to a high degree the faculty of self-disassociation and was capable of dispassionately probing his own subliminal states of mind is apparent from his occasional writings. In "A Fly-Leaf in a Life" from *The Uncommercial Traveller* he speaks of "Being accustomed to observe myself as curiously as if I were another man . . ."; and a second piece, entitled "Lying Awake" gives an astonishing display of the power of autosuggestion [14,15,16] on the passive mentality. Not surprisingly, then, in his more searching character studies, Dickens takes account of the conditions of imaginative awareness which lie on the borderline between the conscious and the unconscious and which find expression in dreams and related states.

Dickens' use of dreams for fictional purposes is extremely sophisticated, anticipating in many respects the findings of Freud. He is especially original in exploiting what may be called the waking dream, in which impressions derived from the surrounding world merge with subjective imaginings. *Oliver Twist* undergoes two such experiences, which leave in their wake an intuitive sense of the evil threatening him. The first occurs in Chapter 9 when Oliver "in a drowsy state, between sleeping and waking" beholds Fagin sorting over the jewelry which includes the trinket once in the possession of the boy's dead mother. "At such times," the author comments, "a mortal knows just enough of what his mind is doing, to form some glimmering conception of its mighty powers, its bounding from earth and spurning time and space, when freed from the restraint of its corporeal associate." The second and more sinister episode comes in Chapter 34. Oliver's new-found security in the Maylie household is shattered when he awakens from a nap to the certainty that Fagin and Monks have been watching him through the open window. The scene is prefaced by this passage:

There is a kind of sleep that steals upon us sometimes, which while it holds the body prisoner, does not free the mind from a sense of things about it, and enable it to ramble at its pleasure. So far as an overpowering heaviness, a prostration of strength, and an utter inability to control our thoughts or power of motion, can be called sleep, this is it; and yet, we have a consciousness of all that is going on about us, and, if we dream at such a time, words which are really spoken, or sounds which really exist at the moment, accommodate themselves with surprising readiness to our visions, until reality and imagination become so strangely blended that it is afterwards almost a matter of impossibility to separate the two. Nor is this, the most striking phenomenon incidental to such a state. It is an undoubted fact, that although our sense of touch and sight be for the time dead, yet our sleeping thoughts, and the visionary scenes that pass before us, will be influenced and materially influenced, by the mere silent presence of some external object; which may not have been near us when we closed our eyes: and of whose vicinity we have had no waking consciousness.



Equally ambiguous in their implications are the distorted images of actuality that penetrate the drowsing minds of Nell, frightened by the nocturnal apparition of her father in the grip of his mania, and of Stephen Blackpool holding vigil over his drunken wife.

Allied with the dream state are the hallucinations which may torment the imagination under extreme emotional stress. Pip prophetically foresees Miss Havisham's death in the hanging effigy that appears to him on his first visit to Satis House. And memories of their long years of imprisonment come back to unsettle the minds of William Dorrit in his final collapse at Rome and Dr. Manette after Lucy's marriage. Differing in effect but equally revelatory of conflicting levels of apprehension are the watery visions which precede Paul Dombey's death and which shadow Eugene Wrayburn's struggle to survive.

Another device for dramatically projecting the warring impulses in man's nature, and one which particularly appealed to Dickens' imagination, is that of doubling. Sometimes, as in the case of Flintwinch and his twin brother, the novelist uses similarity in appearance merely as a narrative contrivance. More often, however, a character recognizes in his double the more ideal or the more degraded half of his divided being. Thus, Sydney Carton confronts his better nature in Charles Darnay; and Edith Dombey's discovery of spiritual kinship with the fallen Alice Marwood provokes the surmise: "In this round world of many circles within circles, do we make a weary journey from the high grade to the low, to find at last that they lie close together, that the two extremes touch, and that our journey's end is but our starting-place?"

These graphic methods of bringing to the surface that clandestine other self which lurks in the inner recesses of being are displayed with special adroitness in the depictions of criminal behavior which are by general agreement Dickens' psychological masterpieces. R. H. Hutton, one of the novelist's earliest and most sagacious critics, declared: "No author indeed could draw more powerfully than he the mood of a man haunted by a fixed idea, a shadowy apprehension, a fear, a dream, a remorse...." And calling attention to Dickens' success in presenting "the restlessness of a murderer," Hutton comments on his knowledge of "the sort of supremacy which a given idea gets over the mind in a dream, and in those waking states of nervous apprehension akin to dreams." Dream psychology is strikingly used to differentiate between two contrasting kinds of criminal mentality in the nightmares which visit Montague Tigg and Jonas Chuzzlewit on the eve of the murder of one by the other. Jonas, furthermore, is paralyzed by the hallucinatory conviction that he has become two separate individuals, as he prepares, after his deed of violence, to return to the room from which he set out in disguise:

Dread and fear were upon him. To an extent he had never counted on, and could not manage in the least degree. He was so horribly afraid of that infernal room at home. This made him, in a gloomy, murderous, mad way, not only fearful for himself but of himself; for being, as it were, a part of the room: a something supposed to be there, yet missing from it: he invested himself with his mysterious terrors; and when he pictured in his mind the ugly chamber, false and quiet, false and quiet, through the dark hours of two nights; and the tumbled bed, and he nor in it, though believed to be; he became in a manner his own ghost and phantom, and was at once the haunting spirit and the haunted man.

In like manner, subjective and objective reality intermingle and are confused in the visions that accompany the headlong flights of Sikes and Carker; and the staring eyes of the dog that drive Sikes over the parapet and the rushing of the engine that dismembers Carker gradually take on for the reader the same unearthly significance lent them in the demented imaginations of the transgressors.

Lady Dedlock, Bradley Headstone, and John Jasper brilliantly exemplify Dickens' handling of the device of doubling to project complexity of motivation in narrative terms. The true nature of each is revealed through the disguises that he assumes. At different times Lady Dedlock is identified with her fierce maid-servant Hortense and Jenny, the brickmaker's wife. The first deception helps create suspense about the perpetrator of Tulkinghorn's murder; the second serves to prolong the chase which fatally terminates at the gates of the burial ground. At a deeper metaphorical level, however, the two characters for whom Lady Dedlock is mistaken represent the felonious and conscience-stricken impulses contending in her breast. Hortense in a very real sense is her symbolic agent in settling accounts with the lawyer who has discovered [136/137]her secret. In changing garb with Jenny, Lady Dedlock not only tacitly acquiesces to the common tie which unites all forlorn mothers, but symbolically atones for her failure in love toward her own daughter. Bradley Headstone's plot to pin suspicion on Rogue Riderhood is a subtle elaboration of Hortense's similar scheme with regard to Lady Dedlock. Of Bradley clad in his schoolmaster's attire the author writes that "there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it...." When he masquerades as Riderhood, however, Dickens says: "And whereas, in his own schoolmaster's clothes, he usually looked as if they were the clothes of some other man, he now looked in the clothes of some other man, or men, as if



they were his own." Bradley's hope that he can return to his old self by shedding the incriminating raiment is as unavailing as are his efforts to put behind him the crime which he perpetually reenacts in his thoughts. Riderhood's arrival to taunt him with the evidence of his duplicity precipitates the teacher's symbolic gesture of erasing his name which he has written on the black-board. The denouement follows with inflexible logic; for the circumstances of their deaths seal the fellow-ship of these twin spirits.

The *Mystery of Edwin Drood*, even in its unfinished form, carries to still more refined extremes Dickens' exploration of the mysterious incongruities in human motivation. The characterization of John Jasper, lay precentor of Cloisterham Cathedral and opium-eater, melodious singer and strangler, anticipates Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. For in this schizophrenic the two selves are fully internalized, and the conflict between good and evil is traced to its ultimate source in the irreconcilable duality of human nature.[16,17]

No one has presented the corrosive effects of guilt more vividly than Dickens. It, more than any other force, motivates change, whether for better or worse, in those of his characters who are not merely static. Dickens' villains are customarily destroyed by guilt, just as his protagonists are redeemed by its operation. It works, however, in different ways, being an effect of wicked actions, but a cause of noble conduct. Its destructive power is manifest in Dickens' earliest delineations of criminals, a Sikes or Ralph Nickleby. Not until relatively late in his career did he succeed, largely through its instrumentality, in creating psychologically convincing roles for the heroes of his stories.

The youthful "leads" who give their names to the early novels or who are nominally apportioned prominent parts in them, Nicholas Nickleby, Kit Nubbles, Jo Willett, Martin Chuzzlewit, Walter Gay, remain for the most part insubstantial figures. Bourgeois variations on the picaro seeking his fortune through adversity, they emerge unscathed from their adventures to enjoy the reward of the conventional happy ending. David Copperfield is the first of Dickens' protagonists who recognizably grows to maturity as a result of the trials he passes through. His characterization is the combined result of Dickens' deepened social awareness and of his need to impose a meaningful pattern on his own early experiences. In this novel, furthermore, Dickens first seriously confronted a challenge which he shared with other Victorian novelists: namely, the problem of locating within the context of contemporary manners and morals the grounds for heroic action. His solution to this problem, paralleling similar efforts by Thackeray, Trollope, and Meredith, was to seek to redefine the traditional concept of the gentleman in conformity with Victorian ideals. In David's eyes, it is Steerforth and not himself who is the hero [138/139] of the story through half its course. And, indeed, the two figures strangely complement each other. Both exhibit a certain ruthlessness in pursuing their ends. Without the narrator's proneness to self-delusion, Steerforth lacks the saving grace of fellow-feeling for the sensibilities of others which mitigates David's weakness. His egoism and readiness to capitalize on his personal charm and the prerogatives of social rank reappear in such gentlemen manque's as Harthouse in *Hard Times* and Henry Gowan in *Little Dorrit*. On the other hand, Steerforth repays David's idolatry with genuine, if condescending, affection; and he is sufficiently shamefaced over his failure to live up to the image he has instilled in David's heart to part with him before the final betrayal. If Steerforth so often usurps interest from the protagonist, it is because his conduct exhibits signs of inner stresses of conscience from which David is exempt as a result of the better fortune contrived for him.

Richard Carstone, whose deterioration under the seductive vision of unmerited gain carried out the author's original plan for *Walter Gay*, is a transitional figure, anticipating the more complexly motivated protagonists of subsequent novels. Arthur Clennam, Sydney Carton, Pip, and Eugene Wrayburn are inheritors of Richard's well-meaning, but vacillating, nature. Like him, also, they nurture undefined, although deeply ingrained, feelings of guilt, which relate them in many ways to the malefactors for whom Dickens compels sympathy. It was one of the novelist's great original insights that unjust treatment may be fully as effective as actual wrongdoing in arousing feelings of remorse and self-doubt. In *The Old Curiosity Shop* Kit Nubbles' anguish at being falsely accused occasions the following passage of commentary: [139/140]

Let moralists and philosophers say what they may, it is very questionable whether a guilty man would have felt half as much misery that night, as Kit did, being innocent. The world, being in the constant commission of vast quantities of injustice, is a little too apt to comfort itself with the idea that if the victim of its falsehood and malice have a clear conscience, he cannot fail to be sustained under his trials, and somehow or other to come right at last; "in which case," say they who have hunted him down, "— though we certainly don't expect it — nobody will be better pleased than we." Whereas, the world would do well to reflect, that injustice is in itself, to every generous and properly constituted mind, an injury, of all others the most insufferable, the most torturing, and the most hard to bear; and that many clear consciences have gone to their account elsewhere, and many sound hearts have broken, because of this very reason, the knowledge of their own deserts only aggravating their sufferings, and rendering them the less endurable.



Although reproachless, Florence Dombey cannot shed the conviction that she is somehow to blame for her father's hostility. Of the state of mind which ensued on his brutal whipping by Murdstone, David Copperfield says: "My stripes were sore and stiff, and made me cry afresh, when I moved; but they were nothing to the guilt I felt. It lay heavier on my breast than if I had been a most atrocious criminal, I dare say." And Pip nurses a residue of self-recrimination as a result of his sister's harsh treatment.

Guilt, instilled by injustice, has in Dickens' view the invariable effect of paralyzing the wills of its victims. The resulting apathy made up in equal measure of self-pity and distrust of active engagement in outside affairs, is brilliantly exemplified by the narrator of the strange short story entitled, "George Silverman's Explanation," as well as in Miss Wade's "The History of a Self-Tormentor." Such poseurs as Harthouse [140/141] and Gowan and Bentley Drummle make much of this lassitude as an aspect of their gentlemanly pretensions. The self-lacerating habit of mind which it induces in more consequential figures is most penetratingly explored in *Little Dorrit*, where it is associated not only with Mrs. Clennam's gloomy Calvinism, but with all the other socially sanctioned forms of egoism which incapacitate the characters in this novel. William Dorrit is not less disabled by his assumption of grandeur than Merdle is by his false eminence as a financier or Casby by his patriarchal posture or Miss Wade by her masochistic delusions.

Humphry House noted that Dickens' view of human nature does not allow for the concept of original sin. Its place is taken by the complex of penitential feelings which enmesh the novelist's most deeply studied characters — feelings which, although they originate in some private conviction of failure or insufficiency, carry with them a sense of responsibility for the evil perpetrated by others. As a result, for all these individuals the inertia imposed by the self-inflicted consciousness of guilt seeks release in acts of vicarious atonement for the actual guilt of others. Arthur takes on himself the burden of Mrs. Clennam's unrevealed secret, and Rokesmith sacrifices his inheritance to make amends for the eccentric provisions of old Harmon's will.

In Dickens' world love is the only force strong enough to burst the bonds the imprisoning ego and to release the capacity for genuinely altruistic action. This is not the divisive sexual passion, which is really another form of self-love. A late discovery in Dickens' fiction, its power destroys Bradley Headstone and John Jasper, leading to deeds of violence which only confirm their dreadful isolation from their kind. The characters [141/142] who achieve self-transcendence are the ones who undergo a change of heart, having learned through suffering to prefer a good other than their own.

Allegorical implications hover over Dickens' representations of spiritual redemption. The fact cannot be too strongly emphasized, however, that Dickens invariably took pains to knit his thematic concerns into the texture of the narrative proper. For example, the expectations raised by Jarvis Lorry's password, "Recalled to Life" at the start of *A Tale of Two Cities*, are circumstantially satisfied by the recovery of Dr. Manette. It is only in the context of the entire train of events leading up to Sydney Carton's heroic sacrifice that the phrase takes on full metaphorical significance. The same is true for the splendid irony of the remark made at the end of Chapter 2 by Jerry Cruncher whose gruesome calling as a Resurrection-Man has yet to be revealed: "'Recalled to life.' That's a Blazing strange message. Much of that wouldn't do for you, Jerry! I say, Jerry! You'd be in a Blazing bad way, if recalling to life was to come into fashoion, Jerry!"

Although most clearly announced in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the theme of resurrection is common to all the late novels. *Dombey and Son* first establishes a recurrent pattern in which the regeneration of a central character is preceded by a period of illness or nervous disorder. Florence Dombey saves her father from suicide. David Copperfield is free to seek out Agnes only after a period of probation in Switzerland. Arthur Clennam undergoes purgation in the Marshalsea. Joe Gargery returns to nurse Pip through the sickness which ensues on Magwitch's death. John Rokesmith emerges with a new identity from near-drowning; and Eugene Wrayburn, broken in body and spirit, is quite literally reborn. In each instance, recovery conforms to the stages in the experience of conversion. The individual, having passed through his dark night of despair, affirms his recovery by some deed of expiation. These deeds are manifold in their points of moral reference; they may be motivated by a desire on the doer's part [142/143] to compensate for his own past transgressions; but in their salvific effects on the lives of others they incarnate the triumph of love over evil. Thus, Sydney Carton's death, in saving the husband of his beloved, at the same time redeems both the inhumanity of Darnay's aristocratic forbears and, more directly through his kindness to the seamstress, the matching inhumanity of the revolutionary tribunal. By succoring Magwitch, Pip does not simply repay in full his debt to his benefactor, but makes up for Compeyson's betrayal of Magwitch and his own of Joe.

The cases of Clennam and Wrayburn are slightly different, since each is tangibly recompensed for his transformation (as is also true for Pip in the revised ending of *Great Expectations*). Yet, each acts without expecting

reward; and neither story, as has been pointed out, can be said to end in unclouded felicity. For in rededicating themselves to the happiness of Amy Dorrit and Lizzie Hexam, both Arthur and Eugene bring to their unions the contrite knowledge that through their own previous mispraisal of the treasures of devotion offered them, they have helped confirm the martyr's role reserved for saints in this world. Nevertheless, Dickens is finally saying that salvation from the blight of the social will can only come through the reconstitution of the individual will by love.

III. RESULTS

Charles John Huffam Dickens (/ˈdɪkɪnz/; 7 February 1812 – 9 June 1870) was an English novelist and social critic who created some of the world's best-known fictional characters, and is regarded by many as the greatest novelist of the Victorian era.^[1] His works enjoyed unprecedented popularity during his lifetime and, by the 20th century, critics and scholars had recognised him as a literary genius. His novels and short stories are widely read today.^{[2][3]}

Born in Portsmouth, Dickens left school at age 12 to work in a boot-blackening factory when his father John was incarcerated in a debtors' prison. After three years, he returned to school before beginning his literary career as a journalist. Dickens edited a weekly journal for 20 years, wrote 15 novels, five novellas, hundreds of short stories and nonfiction articles, lectured and performed readings extensively, was an indefatigable letter writer, and campaigned vigorously for children's rights, education, and other social reforms.^[13,14]

Dickens's literary success began with the 1836 serial publication of *The Pickwick Papers*, a publishing phenomenon—thanks largely to the introduction of the character Sam Weller in the fourth episode—that sparked *Pickwick* merchandise and spin-offs. Within a few years, Dickens had become an international literary celebrity, famous for his humour, satire, and keen observation of character and society. His novels, most of them published in monthly or weekly instalments, pioneered the serial publication of narrative fiction, which became the dominant Victorian mode for novel publication.^{[4][5]} Cliffhanger endings in his serial publications kept readers in suspense.^[6] The instalment format allowed Dickens to evaluate his audience's reaction, and he often modified his plot and character development based on such feedback.^[5] For example, when his wife's chiropodist expressed distress at the way Miss Mowcher in *David Copperfield* seemed to reflect her own disabilities, Dickens improved the character with positive features.^[7] His plots were carefully constructed and he often wove elements from topical events into his narratives.^[8] Masses of the illiterate poor would individually pay a halfpenny to have each new monthly episode read to them, opening up and inspiring a new class of readers.^[9]

His 1843 novella *A Christmas Carol* remains especially popular and continues to inspire adaptations in every creative medium. *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* are also frequently adapted and, like many of his novels, evoke images of early Victorian London. His 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (set in London and Paris) is his best-known work of historical fiction. The most famous celebrity of his era, he undertook, in response to public demand, a series of public reading tours in the later part of his career.^[10] The term *Dickensian* is used to describe something that is reminiscent of Dickens and his writings, such as poor social or working conditions, or comically repulsive characters.^{[11][12]}

Reputation



Dickens's portrait (top left), in between Shakespeare and Tennyson, on a stained glass window at the Ottawa Public Library, Ottawa, Canada

Dickens was the most popular novelist of his time,^[218] and remains one of the best-known and most-read of English authors. His works have never gone out of print,^[219] and have been adapted continually for the screen since the

invention of cinema,^[220] with at least 200 motion pictures and TV adaptations based on Dickens's works documented.^[221] Many of his works were adapted for the stage during his own lifetime – early productions included *The Haunted Man* which was performed in the West End's Adelphi Theatre in 1848 – and, as early as 1901, the British silent film *Scrooge, or, Marley's Ghost* was made by Walter R. Booth.^[222] Contemporaries such as publisher Edward Lloyd cashed in on Dickens's popularity with cheap imitations of his novels, resulting in his own popular 'penny dreadfuls'.^[223]

Dickens created some of the world's best-known fictional characters and is regarded by many as the greatest British novelist of the Victorian era.^[1] From the beginning of his career in the 1830s, his achievements in English literature were compared to those of Shakespeare.^[175] Dickens's literary reputation, however, began to decline with the publication of *Bleak House* in 1852–53. Philip Collins calls *Bleak House* "a crucial item in the history of Dickens's reputation. Reviewers and literary figures during the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, saw a 'drear decline' in Dickens, from a writer of 'bright sunny comedy ... to dark and serious social' commentary".^[224] The *Spectator* called *Bleak House* "a heavy book to read through at once ... dull and wearisome as a serial"; Richard Simpson, in *The Rambler*, characterised *Hard Times* as "this dreary framework"; *Fraser's Magazine* thought *Little Dorrit* "decidedly the worst of his novels".^[225] All the same, despite these "increasing reservations amongst reviewers and the chattering classes, 'the public never deserted its favourite'". Dickens's popular reputation remained unchanged, sales continued to rise, and *Household Words* and later *All the Year Round* were highly successful.^[225]



"Charles Dickens as he appears when reading." Wood engraving from *Harper's Weekly*, 7 December 1867. Author David Lodge called Dickens the "first writer to be an object of unrelenting public interest and adulation".^[226]

Among fellow writers, there was a range of opinions on Dickens. Poet laureate, William Wordsworth (1770–1850), thought him a "very talkative, vulgar young person", adding he had not read a line of his work, while novelist George Meredith (1828–1909), found Dickens "intellectually lacking".^[228] In 1888, Leslie Stephen commented in the *Dictionary of National Biography* that "if literary fame could be safely measured by popularity with the half-educated, Dickens must claim the highest position among English novelists".^[229] Anthony Trollope's *Autobiography* famously declared Thackeray, not Dickens, to be the greatest novelist of the age. However, both Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky were admirers. Dostoyevsky commented: "We understand Dickens in Russia, I am convinced, almost as well as the English, perhaps even with all the nuances. It may well be that we love him no less than his compatriots do. And yet how original is Dickens, and how very English!"^[230] Tolstoy referred to *David Copperfield* as his favourite book, and he later adopted the novel as "a model for his own autobiographical reflections".^[231] French writer Jules Verne called Dickens his favourite writer, writing his novels "stand alone, dwarfing all others by their amazing power and felicity of expression".^[232] Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh was inspired by Dickens's novels in several of his paintings, such as *Vincent's Chair*, and in an 1889 letter to his sister stated that reading Dickens, especially *A Christmas Carol*, was one of the things that was keeping him from committing suicide.^[233] Oscar Wilde generally disparaged his depiction of character, while admiring his gift for caricature.^[234] Henry James denied him a premier position, calling him "the greatest of superficial novelists": Dickens failed to endow his characters with psychological depth, and the novels, "loose baggy monsters",^[235] betrayed a "cavalier organisation".^[236] Joseph Conrad described his own childhood in bleak Dickensian terms, noting he had "an intense and unreasoning affection" for *Bleak House* dating back to his boyhood. The novel influenced his own gloomy portrait of London in *The Secret Agent* (1907).^[231] Virginia Woolf had a love-hate relationship with Dickens, finding his novels "mesmerizing" while reproving him for his sentimentalism and a commonplace style.^[237]

Around 1940–41, the attitude of the literary critics began to warm towards Dickens – led by George Orwell in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (March 1940), Edmund Wilson in *The Wound and the Bow* (1941) and Humphry House in *Dickens and His World*.^[238] However, even in 1948, F. R. Leavis, in *The Great Tradition*, asserted that "the adult mind doesn't as a rule find in Dickens a challenge to an unusual and sustained seriousness"; Dickens was indeed a great genius, "but the genius was that of a great entertainer",^[239] though he later changed his opinion with Dickens the Novelist (1970, with Q. D. (Queenie) Leavis): "Our purpose", they wrote, "is to enforce as unanswerably as possible

the conviction that Dickens was one of the greatest of creative writers".^[240] In 1944, Soviet film director and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein wrote an essay on Dickens's influence on cinema, such as cross-cutting – where two stories run alongside each other, as seen in novels such as *Oliver Twist*.^[241]

In the 1950s, "a substantial reassessment and re-editing of the works began, and critics found his finest artistry and greatest depth to be in the later novels: *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Great Expectations* – and (less unanimously) in *Hard Times* and *Our Mutual Friend*".^[242] Dickens was a favourite author of Roald Dahl; the best-selling children's author would include three of Dickens's novels among those read by the title character in his 1988 novel *Matilda*.^[243] In 2005 Paul McCartney, an avid reader of Dickens, named *Nicholas Nickleby* his favourite novel. On Dickens he states, "I like the world that he takes me to. I like his words; I like the language", adding, "A lot of my stuff – it's kind of Dickensian."^[244] Screenwriter Jonathan Nolan's screenplay for *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) was inspired by *A Tale of Two Cities*, with Nolan calling the depiction of Paris in the novel "one of the most harrowing portraits of a relatable, recognisable civilisation that completely folded to pieces".^[245] On 7 February 2012, the 200th anniversary of Dickens's birth, Philip Womack wrote in *The Telegraph*: "Today there is no escaping Charles Dickens. Not that there has ever been much chance of that before. He has a deep, peculiar hold upon us"^[15,16,17]

Legacy



Dickens and Little Nell statue in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Museums and festivals celebrating Dickens's life and works exist in many places with which Dickens was associated. These include the Charles Dickens Museum in London, the historic home where he wrote *Oliver Twist*, *The Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby*; and the Charles Dickens Birthplace Museum in Portsmouth, the house in which he was born. The original manuscripts of many of his novels, as well as printers' proofs, first editions, and illustrations from the collection of Dickens's friend John Forster are held at the Victoria and Albert Museum.^[247] Dickens's will stipulated that no memorial be erected in his honour; nonetheless, a life-size bronze statue of Dickens entitled *Dickens and Little Nell*, cast in 1890 by Francis Edwin Elwell, stands in Clark Park in the Spruce Hill neighbourhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Another life-size statue of Dickens is located at Centennial Park in Sydney, Australia.^[248] In 1960 a bas-relief sculpture of Dickens, notably featuring characters from his books, was commissioned from sculptor Estcourt J Clack to adorn the office building built on the site of his former home at 1 Devonshire Terrace, London.^[249] In 2014, a life-size statue was unveiled near his birthplace in Portsmouth on the 202nd anniversary of his birth; this was supported by his great-great-grandsons, Ian and Gerald Dickens.^{[250][251]}



A Christmas Carol significantly influenced the modern celebration of Christmas in many countries

A Christmas Carol is most probably his best-known story, with frequent new adaptations. It is also the most-filmed of Dickens's stories, with many versions dating from the early years of cinema.^[252] According to the historian Ronald Hutton, the current state of the observance of Christmas is largely the result of a mid-Victorian revival of the holiday spearheaded by *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens catalysed the emerging Christmas as a family-centred festival of

generosity, in contrast to the dwindling community-based and church-centred observations, as new middle-class expectations arose.^[253] Its archetypal figures (Scrooge, Tiny Tim, the Christmas ghosts) entered into Western cultural consciousness. "Merry Christmas", a prominent phrase from the tale, was popularised following the appearance of the story.^[254] The term Scrooge became a synonym for miser, and his exclamation "Bah! Humbug!", a dismissal of the festive spirit, likewise gained currency as an idiom.^[255] The Victorian era novelist William Makepeace Thackeray called the book "a national benefit, and to every man and woman who reads it a personal kindness"[18,19,20]



Statue of Dickens in his birthplace Portsmouth, Hampshire

Dickens was commemorated on the Series E £10 note issued by the Bank of England that circulated between 1992 and 2003. His portrait appeared on the reverse of the note accompanied by a scene from *The Pickwick Papers*. The Charles Dickens School is a high school in Broadstairs, Kent. A theme park, Dickens World, standing in part on the site of the former naval dockyard where Dickens's father once worked in the Navy Pay Office, opened in Chatham in 2007. To celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Dickens in 2012, the Museum of London held the UK's first major exhibition on the author in 40 years.^[256] In 2002, Dickens was number 41 in the BBC's poll of the 100 Greatest Britons.^[257] American literary critic Harold Bloom placed Dickens among the greatest Western writers of all time.^[258] In the 2003 UK survey *The Big Read* carried out by the BBC, five of Dickens's books were named in the Top 100.^[259]

Actors who have portrayed Dickens on screen include Anthony Hopkins, Derek Jacobi, Simon Callow, Dan Stevens and Ralph Fiennes, the latter playing the author in *The Invisible Woman* (2013) which depicts Dickens's alleged secret love affair with Ellen Ternan which lasted for thirteen years until his death in 1870.^[260]



Soviet postage stamp commemorating Dickens

III. CONCLUSION

Dickens and his publications have appeared on a number of postage stamps in countries including: the United Kingdom (1970, 1993, 2011 and 2012 issued by the Royal Mail—their 2012 collection marked the bicentenary of Dickens's birth),^[261] the Soviet Union (1962), Antigua, Barbuda, Botswana, Cameroon, Dubai, Fujairah, St Lucia and Turks and Caicos Islands (1970), St Vincent (1987), Nevis (2007), Alderney, Gibraltar, Jersey and Pitcairn Islands (2012), Austria (2013), and Mozambique (2014).^[262] In 1976, a crater on the planet Mercury was named in his honour.^[263]

In November 2018 it was reported that a previously lost portrait of a 31-year-old Dickens, by Margaret Gillies, had been found in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Gillies was an early supporter of women's suffrage and had painted the portrait in late 1843 when Dickens, aged 31, wrote *A Christmas Carol*. It was exhibited, to acclaim, at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1844.^[81] The Charles Dickens Museum is reported to have paid £180,000 for the portrait[20]



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